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# *Invitation To Learning*

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# *Invitation To Learning*

DISCUSSIONS OF GREAT BOOKS AND SIGNIFICANT IDEAS

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*Edited by* GEORGE CROTHERS

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# AESCHYLUS

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Prometheus

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LOUIS KRONENBERGER • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* It was about twenty-four hundred years ago that the form of tragic drama, as we know it in our culture, began, and I suppose it's miraculous that we have even one play out of the three that Aeschylus wrote about Prometheus in the fifth century B.C. Like all the other things that the dramatists of that classic time did, this play is a reworking of a legend, and I suppose that, to understand the play, one has to begin by understanding the material that Aeschylus was dealing with—material very well known to the Athenians of the time.

*Kronenberger:* There is no absolutely single legend about Prometheus, is there? In general, he seems to have been a Titan, a god, the son of Themis and Iapetus, who, as his name indicates—it signifies roughly “forethought”—was capable of not only seeing ahead wisely but even divining the future.

*Bryson:* And all the various legends, Mr. Kronenberger, give him the same general character?

*Kronenberger:* Oh, yes!

*Michalopoulos:* He was one of a set of gods, Mr. Bryson, which were older than Zeus and the Olympian gods.

*Bryson:* Zeus was rather a parvenu among the gods, wasn't he?

*Michalopoulos:* Yes, he was a newcomer. He came in with one of the early northern invasions. Zeus and the Olympian gods were the same as the Scandinavian gods and were probably imported from the north, whereas Prometheus was one of the set of gods who were known as the earth gods—Demeter, the earth, and Pluto, the god of Hades, and Dionysus, the god of wine and the harvest and the annual resurrection, the annual recurrence of the harvest, and Persephone—all the gods of fertility. Prometheus was one of those earth gods.

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*Bryson*: Prometheus had actually helped to set up Zeus as the king of the gods by getting rid of Zeus' father, Cronus.

*Kronenberger*: According to the subsequent legend, that's so. But, in spite of this fact, he, by tricking Zeus in one way or another, got Zeus' enmity. Zeus is also thought to have wanted to create another race than the human race, whose great friend Prometheus had become. Prometheus had actually stolen fire and brought it down to men, and from fire the human race is supposed to have attained all its human and cultural blessings.

*Bryson*: That's the central fact, isn't it, Mr. Kronenberger—that Prometheus was the Titan, the god, who gave to man some control over his own destiny and thereby aroused the jealousy of the gods.

*Michalopoulos*: The jealousy and the wrath of Zeus in particular. The early legend has many varieties. There is one variety in which it is assumed that before Prometheus' time there were only men, males, on earth, and that one of the things that Zeus did to punish Prometheus and his proteges, men, was to create woman.

*Bryson*: An astonishing anti-feminist sentiment, Mr. Michalopoulos! Or are you only quoting Prometheus?

*Michalopoulos*: I'm only quoting! I certainly deplore the idea. But this is what Hesiod, that very early bard, said about it. Quoting the legend, that Zeus created Pandora, the first woman, he says Zeus "gave her all things in which man shall rejoice, hugging his own bane, like an immortal goddess to look upon, a lovely maiden shape, teaching it subtle woman's charm and putting therein the mind of a dog, and the heart of a thief."

*Kronenberger*: He had other plans for Prometheus, so he had to send Pandora to Prometheus' brother, Epimetheus—which means afterthought or lack of forethought—who could never see what was coming. He took her in, and she opened her box, and out flew everything evil and pestilential in terms of human life, and she snapped it shut apparently just in time to keep hope at the bottom of it.

*Michalopoulos*: It's interesting that you should say that, because presently we're examining Prometheus' defense against another theory, the leit motif of which is that "I gave men hope; that is my gift to men; they were blind before; they couldn't see, and I've given them hope."

*Bryson*: Well, now, what particular strand of this legend does Aeschylus take, and why does he take that, Mr. Kronenberger? He doesn't have in this play anything except Prometheus being chained to the rock, being threatened by Zeus, and defying Zeus. That's all there is to the play. It's dramatic, but simple.

*Kronenberger*: There was still another factor. Zeus' punishment for humanity was to send them Pandora. Zeus' punishment of Prometheus was to chain him to the rock where apparently he would always have to stay—except for one piece of knowledge that he had, and

that he could hold up to Zeus' head like a pistol. He knew which of Zeus' possible sons would become more powerful than Zeus and overthrow him. He knew, in other words, that the mother would be Thetis. And the final resolution in the play that has not survived, is apparently that, in return for being released by a much more merciful and much more tolerant Zeus, he told Zeus the secret. So Thetis was married off to Peleus, a mortal, and became the mother of Achilles.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, Mr. Kronenberger, here we have the central story of the play—although Pandora doesn't come into Aeschylus at all as far as one can see. But, in examining this play, you discover that it's not just a story. The story plays a rather small part in the whole business.

*Bryson*: It's mainly lyric poetry and profound feeling!

*Michalopoulos*: It's a magnificent dramatic poem, and the action comes through a series of dramatic effects. There are few personages, but the dramatic effect progresses throughout the play and rises to a crescendo which ends in a terrific storm in which Prometheus goes down, condemned. He's on a rock, and the whole rock crashes down through the stage. It actually did, on the Greek stage. They made an effigy of Prometheus which was about twenty feet high with an actor inside it, and Prometheus crashed right down through the stage, amid thunder and lightning, condemned to this rock till he should be liberated.

*Bryson*: But after his magnificent defiance of Zeus.

*Michalopoulos*: After his magnificent defiance, after his magnificent speeches! You remember the opening scene, where there is Force and Violence, or Authority and Violence if you like, that are hammering the nails in? Authority says, in effect, "This man has been a rebel; he has got to be hammered to this rock and punished because he is a rebel." I think Aeschylus meant that. I mean, he wasn't just saying, "Poor Prometheus! What a bad time he's having." That was only a secondary feeling. His feeling was that religious authority had to be upheld, and he had a reason for that.

*Bryson*: Well, that gets us to the question of what Aeschylus was trying to do in his own time. Obviously he is doing something more than merely telling this segment of the legend of Prometheus. He's doing something more than showing that Prometheus, at the moment of the beginning of his punishment for defying Zeus, was still defiant. He shows Prometheus as a rebel; and isn't it true that our modern sympathy is rather with the rebel?

*Michalopoulos*: The reason why our sympathy is with the rebel is that we have only this one play, as Mr. Kronenberger has already indicated, which is the central one of three plays.

*Kronenberger*: Don't you think there's one other reason? Aeschylus was much more concerned with the struggle between Prometheus and Zeus as a religious struggle.

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*Michalopoulos*: Of course! I was just going to say that!

*Kronenberger*: But it appears to us much more as a political struggle.

*Bryson*: Yes, because the religious meaning is drained out of it.

*Kronenberger*: So, today we see Zeus as the tyrant and Prometheus as the rebel and friend of mankind.

*Michalopoulos*: There is a strain of that in the play, too, but we mustn't forget that Aeschylus was primarily a religious reformer. I think that comes out in all his plays. He was a religious reformer. He came at a very interesting time in Greek history. He himself fought the battle of Marathon. He was present during that great time of tribulation when Athens was occupied by the Persians. He saw the Persians driven out. He saw the Athenians come back into their city and try to rebuild their temples, although he didn't survive to see the Parthenon built.

*Bryson*: He saw the beginning of greatness.

*Michalopoulos*: He saw the beginning of greatness and he participated in that feeling of achievement that the Athenians had, at having defeated a stupendous foe. The Persian Empire was the most tremendous empire in the world at that time, and this little city had defeated that empire. So Aeschylus, together with the Greeks of his time, felt that they had achieved something, and that there was now a need for moral security as well as physical security. The Persians might come again! They had to revise their whole religious philosophy, because the Olympian gods, in many ways, were not satisfactory. The old gods were there. The old gods themselves were based on superstition, and that superstition was very strong among the people. By the old gods, I mean the earth gods about whom we talked before.

*Kronenberger*: Would Aeschylus himself still have faith in the gods? Or would he have lost faith, and simply be trying to find some form of authority that would have a moral value for the Athenians?

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I can't vouch for Aeschylus' personal faith.

*Kronenberger*: Did he want to revise religion in terms of faith or in terms of morality?

*Michalopoulos*: He wanted reforms in terms of a state religion which should be dignified enough for this Athens emerging into greatness. In other words, he was trying to found a monotheistic religion. The other Olympian gods are reduced to secondary positions—to the positions of saints, let us say—and Zeus is extolled all the time. All through the play it's Zeus . . . Zeus . . . Zeus! That is why you cannot take this play alone and assume that Aeschylus approves of the religious defiance and the defiance of authority shown by Prometheus. In all his plays he says much the same thing. The *Eumenides* is a case in point. In the *Eumenides* there's this refrain:

Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως  
Ἐπινίκια κλάζων  
Τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν.



"He who cries with all his heart, he who cries 'hail to Zeus' shall come to the completeness of wisdom." That's a refrain that recurs over and over.

*Kronenberger*: In seeking monotheism he is really trying to find a kind of central authority for morality, isn't he, a kind of moral unity that the Athenians can all be bound round with?

*Michalopoulos*: Yes! He's trying also to destroy utterly the practices associated with old superstitions.

*Bryson*: And our difficulty, Mr. Michalopoulos, is that the identification of the practices of superstition is with Prometheus who, by his own magnificent description of himself, is the man who has helped the human race against the gods. That makes it very complicated for us, because we don't see the development of the practical arts as superstition; we see them as the very defeat of superstition.

*Michalopoulos*: Mr. Bryson, it is complicated for us and it would have been complicated for the Athenians if they hadn't had the other two plays.

*Bryson*: Yes, I see.

*Michalopoulos*: I mean, the first play shows Prometheus stealing the fire out of Zeus' thunderbolt. Now, Zeus' thunderbolt was his own property and his own symbol of authority. Prometheus goes and takes the fire in defiance of authority for a good purpose, but he had stolen a spark from the atom bomb; he had stolen some uranium from Zeus. It's the same story as the story of the Garden of Eden.

*Bryson*: It's very much like the Adam and Eve story.

*Michalopoulos*: Knowledge is God's manifestation through various channels, and that manifestation, according to authority, has to come at God's proper time.

*Kronenberger*: It seems to me, so far as we can reconstruct the last play of the trilogy, the *Prometheus Unbound*, which ends with a kind of reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus, that Aeschylus can hardly be said to come out for authority at the expense of enlightenment. It seems to me that Aeschylus is trying to reconcile the two and saying that rebelliousness is sometimes important but that it also leads to a state of confusion—that humanity makes many mistakes, but it cannot be put under the foot of a tyrant.

*Bryson*: Aeschylus doesn't condemn the actual enlightenment which Prometheus brought to man. He condemns the spirit—the rebelliousness, the refusal to submit to orders—that Prometheus represents. Is that it, Mr. Kronenberger?

*Kronenberger*: It seems to me that this play is not in favor of Zeus. It seems to me that this play, in which Prometheus is not only the protagonist, but the lawyer for the defense, so to speak, makes out an excellent case for Prometheus. And almost everybody who comes

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along, who isn't obviously a time-server like Hermes or Oceanus, feels the same way about Zeus, that he is tyrannical and that he has done injustice.

*Michalopoulos*: But, you see, Mr. Kronenberger, again I insist that this is the middle play, and the three plays were played together. It's like the middle act, if you like, of a modern play. The other two plays would be played on the same day, the one before and the one after.

*Kronenberger*: Oh, I don't deny that it may be part of a larger design. This is the case for Prometheus. The last and no longer extant play is the case for Zeus.

*Michalopoulos*: This one is the case for Prometheus; it's Prometheus' defense. And as a magnificent artist, Aeschylus puts into Prometheus' mouth the popular sentiments . . .

*Bryson*: That appeal to us, Mr. Michalopoulos?

*Michalopoulos*: And appealed to the Athenians, too.

*Kronenberger*: He puts into Prometheus' mouth a whole catalog of the services that Prometheus had rendered.

*Michalopoulos*: He certainly does!

*Bryson*: I think Prometheus' statement, and his own claim to greatness is almost the high point of the play.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, yes! He says:

"Think not from pride, nor yet from bitterness,  
I'm silent. . . .

. . . Hear now the sorry tale  
Of mortal man. A thing of no avail  
He was, until a living mind I wrought  
Within him. . . ."

You see, he's proud there. He still is rebellious. "I wrought," he says. "Zeus, you did nothing. I did."

" . . . I wrought

Within him a new mastery of thought.  
I cast no blame on man; I do but crave  
To show what love was in the gifts I gave."

Then he gives a catalog of all those technological gifts.

*Bryson*: The gifts that he has made to man.

*Michalopoulos*: ". . . I hanelled to the rein  
The gentle steed, and in the chariot tied.  
For rich men who would glory in their pride.  
I made, none else, for mariners the free  
And flaxen-winged chariots of the sea.  
Alas, all these new wisdoms I could find  
For mortals, but no wisdom to unbind  
These mine own fetters. . . ."

He's a tragic figure. He's done all these good things for men. No doubt the audience approved; no doubt they said, "Oh, well, Prometheus is the representative of progress and a sort of humanitarian deity." But at the same time Aeschylus is trying to tone down Zeus a little. He says Zeus could no longer be this old naughty god. He's got to be a dignified god. But we want one god; we want a state religion; we want something noble and great. That was his ideal. Mind you, he failed.

*Kronenberger*: Yes, of course. But he had to humanize Zeus. It's usually assumed that, at the end of the trilogy, Zeus is no longer this despotic and heartless god who flings his lesser gods about like rice, and that he had become a much more understanding and merciful and fatherly god than he is at any point in the *Prometheus Bound*.

*Bryson*: Let's get back to this as a drama, Mr. Michalopoulos, which I don't think we ought completely to ignore. You read there from Gilbert Murray's translation, I think. Wasn't that Murray's translation?

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, it was.

*Bryson*: How much does that give us of the feeling of the Greek itself?

*Michalopoulos*: Well, it's very difficult to say, because Greek is a very special language, and Aeschylus is a very special dramatist, a very special poet. The rhetorical effects, the majesty of language, the great orchestration of sound in Aeschylus is something that's never been reproduced and cannot be reproduced. It is magnificent. All translation from one language to another poses difficult problems. I think Aeschylus poses perhaps *the* most difficult. Murray has given us very elegant verse. It is a bit too . . .

*Bryson*: Too pretty?

*Michalopoulos*: . . . too pretty, perhaps.

*Bryson*: Well, what about translating the problem into modern times? I think we have today a widely pervasive feeling in this country that there's something impious about our present knowledge. We have, in a sense, stolen fire from the gods in discovering the secrets of nuclear energy. A lot of people are uneasy that we may have committed a sin for which some god will punish us with destruction because we know too much.

*Michalopoulos*: That's an ingenious idea, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: Don't you think it's very widespread?

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, I daresay there is that feeling among certain religious groups. But I don't think that it is entirely comparable, because Aeschylus is a positive poet and a positive thinker. I mean, he was trying to create, to shape, the old religion into something new, while not destroying the old gods of superstition, because they were rooted in the people. He was trying to ennoble them. Prometheus,

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once he comes to his compromise in the last poem, has a trump card; he knows something about Zeus which will cause Zeus' destruction. He then offers a solution.

*Bryson*: That part is never played.

*Kronenberger*: It's not played, but it's exchanged.

*Bryson*: I mean, finally there is a compromise.

*Kronenberger*: Prometheus gets loose in return for telling Zeus whom he must not marry. But, actually, it's Prometheus whose hybris and pride are at stake in the Greek drama. In any analogy with today, it would be *we* who are presumptuous in assuming the rights of the gods. So the analogy breaks down.

*Bryson*: You think that the Prometheus legend doesn't quite work out?

*Kronenberger*: Well, Prometheus would have to be a physicist today, rather than humanity, don't you think?

*Bryson*: Of course he would! But the Athenians who listened to *Prometheus Bound* may have been very uneasy just for the same reasons that people now are uneasy over the way the atomic physicists are playing around with destruction.

*Michalopoulos*: Poor old Prometheus! I feel rather sorry to have him compared to Dr. Fuchs!

*Kronenberger*: But Prometheus is more than that! He symbolizes the essential struggle between the great rebel and the great tyrant that has always gone on and will go on throughout history.

# SHAKESPEARE

## *Hamlet*

JOHN CARRADINE • LOUIS KRONENBERGER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: When one undertakes to talk about *Hamlet*, the problem seems to me to be that of trying to decide which, of all the many thousands of things that have been said about *Hamlet*, ought to be said again.

*Carradine*: Well, I don't suppose there's anything really new that can be said about *Hamlet*, but I think that there are some things that it would be well to have said again.

*Bryson*: Because of misinterpretations?

*Carradine*: Because of the misinterpretations that have been placed upon the play during the last eighty or ninety years.

*Bryson*: You think, Mr. Carradine, that the *Hamlet* we get in the movies and on the stage is not the *Hamlet* that we ought to get?

*Carradine*: I'm sure I think that! I think it's well to remind ourselves how the play is constructed. I think that, though the editors have put it in five acts, it could more properly be divided into three sections. The first section is a period of preparation, of building interest in the characters and the situation in Denmark. The second section I call a comedy of masks, with everybody wearing a false face, everyone spying on everyone else—and they're all having a pretty good time doing it. And the third section is the wind-up, the disposition of the characters in the situation.

*Bryson*: And there it is tragic.

*Carradine*: There it is tragic. It is tragic in the beginning and tragic in the end. The center part is a comedy of masks.

*Kronenberger*: I think that's true. I think the comedy of masks can be looked at in two ways, Mr. Carradine. One is that this is a play of intrigue in which treachery and deception are part of the plot. The other is that it's a play of character in which Hamlet preeminently

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wears a series of masks to fool other people, and partly because he's a very self-conscious man who is interested in playing roles.

*Carradine*: I suppose that he is a sort of dilettante in all the arts. He pretends to some knowledge of several of them.

*Bryson*: All the virtues were attributed to him at one time or another, Mr. Carradine. But, when you say that people in the middle are playing parts, the comedy of masks, are you indicating there that the Elizabethans would have looked upon this as different from the way we look at it—that they would have been interested in the intrigue? Isn't it true that when the modern critic talks about *Hamlet* he lets fall away all the old Elizabethan apparatus of blood and thunder and intrigue and is interested only in the spiritual problem? The play is a good deal more than just a spiritual problem.

*Carradine*: Oh, I'm sure of that, Mr. Bryson. I think the play is essentially a melodrama, and a most exciting one. If the modern productions would keep that in mind, *Hamlet* would be more interesting to the general public than it seems to be right now.

*Kronenberger*: But, in that sense, don't you think it is a play of masks straight through? Laertes and the King are still wearing masks at the end when they rig up that duel.

*Carradine*: I wonder whether they are wearing masks at that point or not. I think they're pretty serious by that time. Things have come to a fairly difficult pass.

*Kronenberger*: But they're still attempting to inveigle Hamlet into the duel.

*Carradine*: Well, it's true in that sense, Mr. Kronenberger, that they're wearing masks—but for a less concealed purpose, I should say.

*Kronenberger*: I think those are plot masks.

*Carradine*: That's true!

*Kronenberger*: Masks of character, it seems to me, would gradually be taken off, although sometimes exchanged for others.

*Bryson*: Are you gentlemen suggesting that the reason why the character of Hamlet has seemed to baffle people, or has become a kind of stock puzzle of esthetics and philosophy, is because the structure of the play is such that everybody in it spends so much time pretending something? Is that the reason why the play is so difficult to understand?

*Kronenberger*: Perhaps that's one of the reasons, Mr. Bryson.

*Carradine*: I think the principal reason would be that. After all, all of us in life are wearing masks at all times. I think the play's pretty true to life. I think that is one of the reasons why it is such an exciting play and could be just as exciting for today's and tomorrow's audience as it was in the time of Elizabeth and James.

*Bryson*: What Shakespeare is saying to us, then, is something differ-

ent from that which the dramatist who easily makes a play says. Shakespeare is not taking people to represent a single passion, or taking them as simple factors in a conflict, but he is really making them human beings where there are these overlaying strata of character that don't always coincide with each other.

*Carradine*: I'm sure of that. I'm sure that Shakespeare's characters are not simply the characters in the play but are representative of certain kinds of human beings and of many kinds of human beings. I think that, and I think Mr. Kronenberger is not very likely to disagree with me on this, the character of Hamlet himself has undergone certain changes in the dramatic representations since the Elizabethans. I'm of the opinion that Hamlet was the arch prototype of the ideal prince, and, as such, was a man of action and talent. Consider the sort of man that was available to Shakespeare as a model, a man such as Sir Walter Raleigh or Sir Francis Bacon, a man of good family, of high birth, and high station, a man who would have been interested in the very masculine in every respect, who were soldiers. They were scholars: they were statesmen: they were diplomats, and they were poets; they were patrons of the arts, everyone of them. And Hamlet is no less the ideal prince than either of these men who we believe were the models for the character of Hamlet. This was, I think, true in the representations of the play until about the middle of the last century, when the romantic school began, and we got the idea foisted on us that Hamlet is a hesitant neurotic and goes mooning about the palace all the time.

*Kronenberger*: I think that's true. I think the kind of sick-cat Hamlet that we have been treated to, the languishing, black-dressed fellow, who goes around the stage and seems good for nothing but soliloquizing is all wrong. On the other hand, I don't think that you can turn Hamlet into a Lionel Strongfort. I think he's essentially an introspective man because he's wearing a mask, and the mask is very often to deceive himself rather than the outsider. Caroline Spurgeon, in her fascinating book about imagery in Shakespeare,\* does discover, you know, that it's in Hamlet that there are the most images about sickness and disease. In that sense it can't be accidental that we see Hamlet as essentially a neurotic figure. But that doesn't mean that he isn't also a man of action or capable of action. He is capable of action.

*Carradine*: He certainly is!

*Kronenberger*: He stabs Polonius without thinking twice. He schemes the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern without thinking twice. He does quite well at the end. In fact, there's a contrary view, you know, that Hamlet is a very bloody fellow who causes trouble wherever he goes.

*Carradine*: Well, he certainly is a man who has accomplished a great

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\**Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us.*

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

deal in life for someone who's considered to be a hesitant, neurotic who doesn't accomplish anything. We have a man, who, before the play begins, has apparently made successful love to the most eligible girl in the kingdom, a man well prepared to be the King of Denmark, and, in fact, has a great desire to be so. Remember, in his scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, where they are trying to find out what his trouble is, he says he lacks "advancement," and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern remind him that he has the voice of the King himself and the right of succession. Then Hamlet has that rather sly little remark that "where the grass grows the" . . . "where the grass grows the" . . . what is it now? Help me out!†

*Kronenberger*: I don't know!

*Bryson*: I would never know!

*Kronenberger*: Don't you think, though, that we must take the use of the word neurosis, or neurotic, as meaning ineffectual? It seems to me that in this play, Laertes, who is rash to the extent that Hamlet is delaying, gets into just as much trouble. In the play that came just before this, *Julius Caesar*, Brutus, who is essentially the introspective and philosophic man, gets into just as much trouble by turning into a man of action. So the point is not necessarily that by being introspective Hamlet isn't capable of action, but that, being introspective, he is a particular kind of man—what might be called the modern man, the man who looks at himself, who has an awareness of action, and awareness of tragedy. I think the awareness of tragedy in Hamlet is what marks him as modern.

*Bryson*: You raise a point there, Mr. Kronenberger, of considerable interest, as to the validity of the commonly expressed view that, in a great tragedy like *Hamlet*, it is in the character of the leading person that you find the reason for the tragedy. This doesn't seem to me to be Shakespearian or Elizabethan at all. It seems to me that the tragedy of Hamlet lies not in his character, but in the conflict in his life. Mr. Carradine has described his fitness to be King and the circumstance, completely external to himself, of the fact that his father has been murdered—or, at least he thinks he may have been murdered—that his uncle has mounted the throne, that his uncle has seduced his mother, and, in other words, that his public career has come into direct conflict with the private circumstances of his life, and no character could resolve that conflict easily. What kind of a person could have taken the circumstances in which Hamlet found himself and found a quick, decisive, neat solution?

*Carradine*: I don't suppose anyone could have done that.

*Kronenberger*: That's exactly it!

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†Mr. Carradine is referring to a proverb which even Hamlet forgot. It reads "While the grass grows" and appears in Act III Scene II.



*Carradine*: Cromwell was a man of action, but he certainly found an awful lot of trouble which it took a great many years to resolve.

*Kronenberger*: Hamlet is, in one sense, wearing all these masks because he can't face the real problem in himself.

*Carradine*: That first problem in Hamlet, Mr. Kronenberger, and Mr. Bryson, is that he had a very great father, which is something which seems to have gone by the board in representations of the play. I think it's most important for an understanding of Hamlet to understand the greatness of his father. His father was a man who was so great a king that he was a legend in his own time, even before he died he must have been greatly worshipped and revered, the epitome of the great soldier, king, father of his people. With such a weight of heritage behind him I'm sure that any man in Hamlet's position would feel the heaviness of the task laid upon him—to be a worthy successor to his father.

*Kronenberger*: There are really three problems that Hamlet has to face, and never quite does—the greatness of his father; the guilt of his mother, which certainly is important to him; and the usurpation of his uncle. It's not merely that Claudius is a murderer; it's that Claudius is a usurper.

*Bryson*: And has usurped the throne to which Hamlet is heir.

*Kronenberger*: It seems to me that like all people—and this is again where Hamlet seems to me to be so marvelously modern—who are particularly capable of reason, as Hamlet is, he is also particularly capable of rationalizing, and he always finds another reason for what he is or is not doing. The soliloquies, to my mind, are not revelations of the inner man, but revelations of the introspective man, the man who is seeing himself in one light or another as the particular situation of opportunity presents.

*Carradine*: I think it's unfortunate that we have to consider these passages under the name "soliloquy." Soliloquy means one thing to us and I think it probably meant quite a different thing to Shakespeare. After all, what are the soliloquies but a theatrical means of telling what the character is.

*Kronenberger*: They're states of mind that are supposed to be revealed.

*Carradine*: They're really not set speeches at all. As a matter of fact, when I'm playing *Hamlet* I try to restore these speeches to the body of the play. I don't try to separate them or make them set speeches as the old-time actors used to do. You know, everybody used to take the stage and there would be a certain definite pause and then you knew, "Here comes a big speech." Then you waited for that big speech and then the play went on after that.

*Bryson*: A speech to the audience?

*Carradine*: A speech directly to the audience.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Bryson*: You think Shakespeare didn't intend them that way?

*Carradine*: I don't believe he did.

*Kronenberger*: I agree with Mr. Carradine.

*Carradine*: An aside was always played to the audience. I'm sure that Polonius' little asides about his daughter were played directly to the audience, and were for the purpose of eliciting a response.

*Kronenberger*: I think the speeches to himself are to some other self that he is dramatizing, and they all end in a question-mark in a sense. They're states of mind in the sense, aren't they, Mr. Carradine and Mr. Bryson, that he is asking rather than stating?

*Carradine*: I don't think Hamlet ever arrives at the point where he states anything, except perhaps in his last soliloquy, which, to me, is the greatest speech in the play, though there are speeches which are more exciting as means of unfolding the drama in the play. I think his speech on the plains of Denmark is the greatest utterance in the play. It's very infrequently done in the theatre, one reason being, I suppose, that it requires an extra set to play the scene. The set you have to use for that is a pioneer set, and it's difficult to stage that in the modern unit setting which we have to use because of economy in the theatre, and it also requires the use of five or six extra characters.

*Kronenberger*: And also because Fortinbras is pretty well cut out of the play.

*Carradine*: More or less today, yes. He is an extra character, too, it seems.

*Bryson*: What about his attitude toward Ophelia? How do you explain that? You say he made successful love to the most eligible girl in the kingdom, which was Ophelia, and here, at one point in the play, he discards Ophelia, which makes a tragedy for her.

*Carradine*: I think it's just a case of a pretty smart man, a rather worldly man, an introspective man, with a great task laid on him, realizing that this girl with whom he's in love could never begin to understand his problem. We remember that he visits her shortly after his interview with the ghost when he's, of course, at his most distraught condition.

*Bryson*: And he's not quite sure the ghost is telling him the truth?

*Carradine*: He's not sure yet that the ghost is a real ghost. He hasn't made up his mind that it's not a devil in disguise, and he goes to unburden his heart to this girl whom he loves. I suppose what happens is—and we're told about it only by Ophelia; we don't see the thing happen, but we are told of the pantomime in which he indulges during that visit to Ophelia when he takes a look at her and shakes his head and disappears, walking backwards out of the room, shaking his head mournfully, and heaving a great sigh—I suppose that what happened was that he immediately went to the woman he loved to unburden himself and seek some comfort and perhaps some solution.

and he took one look at that innocent and empty face and decided it was utterly useless to ask, and he gave it up.

*Kronenberger*: Well, I think the time was out of joint for love as well as everything else, don't you?

*Carradine*: That's very aptly stated, Mr. Kronenberger! I wish I had thought of that!

*Bryson*: But the pathos of Ophelia's death, although it leads him to an outburst of eloquence and challenge to Laertes, her brother, doesn't actually affect him very deeply, does it? Is that because he's still thinking so much of his own problems?

*Carradine*: No, I think there's another reason for that, which is part and parcel of my argument that Hamlet has been changed in representation since the eighteen-fifties and when the romantic school came in. Consider that he was a very successful man at this point in the play. He's returned from England where he got rid of Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern without a qualm, and he's already killed Polonius. He comes back, having been set ashore in Denmark unharmed by pirates who had attacked his ship, and apparently he had given such a good account of himself as a fighting man that the pirates in admiration set him ashore and gave him new clothes! So, here we have a man, who, after all the troubles that he'd been through, has found that he can be a successful man in the world, just simply on the terms of being a man, let alone being a prince or a scholar. He's a successful man, and he must have got quite a good deal of satisfaction out of that. And, on top of this success and this newly acquired self-respect—it's a kind of resurrection for Hamlet, a resurrection of the spirit of this man—on top of this, here is the shock of Ophelia's death. The shock is more profound, I think, at the moment because of the resurrection he's just been through, but it doesn't last very long because he's still burgeoning with success, and, shortly after the scene at the graveyard, we find him in a very realistic conversation, telling about his exploits and boasting about them.

*Kronenberger*: I think that's true. That brings out a good point about Hamlet: that he has a kind of enthusiasm, a kind of gusto, almost a kind of gaiety for everything which is at the same time combined with self-disgust. He despises himself for unpacking his heart with words, but he dotes on words at the same time. He has a wonderful sense of them. He's really a great genius at words, and not just because Shakespeare is putting them into his mouth. He has a kind of excitement, an inner excitement, about almost everything that he does.

*Carradine*: I think that the most important thing in playing *Hamlet*, is to convey that inner excitement of the man.

*Kronenberger*: That's why he is an actor, because he loves his part even while he hates himself.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Bryson*: And that's why the dismal, droning Hamlets are not really the Hamlet that Shakespeare thought about, the Hamlet that makes it a great play—although it always is a great play, isn't it?

*Carradine*: It seems to be a great play no matter what you do with it.

*Bryson*: It's pretty hard to spoil it, isn't it?

*Carradine*: I think it's impossible. I've seen sixteen different Hamlets and some of them were pretty awful, but I believe that no actor is bad enough to spoil that play.

*Bryson*: And perhaps you can say at the same time that no actor is good enough to do it justice.

*Carradine*: No, no actor is good enough to do all parts of it justice. I suppose the old saying is that there's a little of Hamlet in all of us and a little of all of us in Hamlet.

*Bryson*: What about his attitude towards his mother, Mr. Kronenberger? What do you think about that strangely ambivalent part of the show?

*Kronenberger*: That is, I suppose, in modern considerations of *Hamlet* the crux and the most disputed and touched-upon point. Certainly, his feeling for his mother is both a very equivocal and a strong one. It comes out in constant references to her as an adulteress. He's really very outspoken in phrases about her adultery and her guilt, and it seems to me that there is the key to his particular relationship to her and the King and his father—although there may be much more in terms of his own ambitions—and he's never quite able to face it. He can only face it with a kind of sarcastic wit—"Hamlet, thou has thy father much offended." "Mother, thou hast my father much offended." It always comes out as a kind of witty sarcasm.

*Carradine*: I think probably the trouble with Hamlet's relationship with his mother is that he doesn't quite realize that his father was such a great man, that he was probably terribly bored with his mother, and that he doesn't realize the excuse—if not an excuse at least the human frailty—which would be bound to exert its influence on the Queen during the King's long absences.

*Bryson*: That would be very natural.

*Kronenberger*: That sound very true. I think it would, yes.

*Bryson*: That's the way a son would look upon such a situation. But is the ambivalence of his attitude, the equivocation of his attitude toward his mother the real point of his seeming to be a hesitant character? As Mr. Carradine was saying a moment ago, this is a man that goes right straight through the play, meeting all kinds of crises and surmounting them with expedition and triumph and dispatch, and not seeming to be bothered much by any problem that comes along except this central one.

*Carradine*: I think the main point of his hesitancy is his lack of conviction about the ghost.

*Bryson*: That's the beginning.

*Carradine*: Well, here we have the machinery of Elizabethan demonology at work in Shakespeare's play. The Elizabethans believed in the spiritual survival and they also believed in devils and they believed it was possible for the devil to assume such a guise as Hamlet refers to.

*Kronenberger*: The reasons he gives himself for hesitating are all perfectly sound and clear. First, this may not be his father, it may be the devil. Second, he must find out by confronting the King with the play. Then he can't kill him because he's at prayer, and so forth. Why, however, this becomes the one problem that he can't meet, the one piece of action that he can't perform, I don't know. The reasons would seem to go deeper. I don't think the answer lies just there in terms of his mother, and I don't know that we ought to understand it. I don't think Hamlet is a character to be understood. I think, as Mr. Mark Van Doren would say, he's real because he's an enigma.

*Carradine*: As all men are to a degree.

*Kronenberger*: And to make a case history of Hamlet, would be, it seems to me, the greatest injustice to him, to Shakespeare, and in a sense to ourselves. We could never go to the play with half as much fascination.

*Carradine*: I wonder, Mr. Kronenberger, if Hamlet didn't enjoy his problems and cling to them.

*Kronenberger*: Oh, I think he did. I think that's partly what's wrong with him and partly what I meant by his enthusiasm for self-disgust—his enjoyment of being an actor.

*Bryson*: In a very real sense, I should think, Hamlet is a kind of central character of the renaissance in England, where you have the kind of man who has so much zest for life that he enjoys his own sorrows. The combination of deep introspective possibilities and all these talents, and immense gusto, leads us to a man who can't take life simply and solve life's problems simply. That may have been one of the things that was characteristic of the renaissance person.

*Carradine*: Mr. Bryson, we come right back to what I said some time ago about Hamlet being the beau ideal, the epitome of the ideal prince. Certainly, he is the arch type of the renaissance man.

*Kronenberger*: And of the modern man! I think there's something to be written on the compensations of neuroses!

*Carradine*: Hamlet has been labeled a renaissance man, and I wish there were more renaissance men alive today. I think the world might be better off.

*Bryson*: I should think what keeps us all from being Hamlets is not problems, and possibly not the capacity for action, but the capacity to be so passionate about the thing. We are such wonderful actors at our own lives.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Carradine*: Might it not be that we fail to understand Hamlet because modern man is to such a high degree a specialist, whereas, the renaissance man was a more rounded man?

*Kronenberger*: Oh, I think that's very true.

*Bryson*: At any rate, there you have the endless fascination of the play.

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# SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

## Outlines of Pyrrhonism

STRINGFELLOW BARR • IRWIN EDMAN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* is not a great book in the sense of having great original force in its intellectual structure or in its literary form. It's not a book that's accessible to the ordinary reader, because it's seldom translated and very seldom reprinted. But it's worth talking about, because it represents a point of view of many years ago—this man flourished (as we say) about 200 A.D. — which is held by many people now, and stems from a time which is, roughly, like our own. It is a presentation of one form of the skeptic's point of view.

*Edman*: Sextus Empiricus, Mr. Bryson, about whom we know very little—which is when we most use the word “flourished” about an ancient philosopher—wrote this book, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. It is really a handbook of certain doctrines in philosophy, certain points of view and certain ideas, which were originally, flexibly, and seriously stated by Plato and Aristotle, but which had become solidified into dogmas and academic teachings of certain schools. Sextus Empiricus wrote an outline of certain rebellions against what he thought were doctrinaire dogmas. His book is divided into attacks on logicians, on physicists, on ethicists, on school masters. And he tries to celebrate the ideas particularly of Pyrrho, a notable predecessor of his own, who argued half-playfully that there was nothing we could be certain of, basing his thought on suggestions originally made in Plato that we must distrust the senses and even that reason by means of which we interpret what the senses give us.

*Bryson*: A skeptic has to be more or less playful, doesn't he, Mr. Edman, if he is going to be persuasive?

*Edman*: Well, he does have to be playful, because, if you take skepticism literally, one would even doubt that one could be heard, or that one could form a word.

*Bryson*: Or that one could doubt.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Barr*: Speaking of whether one could doubt, whether he could even form a word, Sextus' use of the word "aphasia" interested me. I know that I'm just playing an etymological trick, but at one point I felt like saying: "Are you sure you have the right to use those words to me? When you're saying, we can't know anything and we can't even be sure of our senses, maybe there's nothing you can say to me that makes any difference one way or the other."

*Edman*: There's another form of skepticism prevalent in a contemporary philosophical discussion, a kind of playing with skepticism about words. If you invite somebody to dinner, you say just "next Tuesday"; and your guest says, "Just what do you mean by Tuesday?" There's a good deal of skepticism about words in our society (which we now call semantic criticism) as well as doubt about the senses and about reason. There's one more thing I think we ought to mention about the book itself at once, that if you can doubt such fundamentally apparently obvious things as the deliverance of the senses or of your own mind, then certainly you can doubt not only the existence of other people, but certainly their customary and moral ideals. The important thing is to see what Sextus thought he was driving at. And he thought he was driving at a kind of quietude, a kind of moral aphasia.

*Barr*: A kind of moral peace of mind.

*Edman*: That's it!

*Bryson*: In other words, it's an eighteen hundred year-old version of "*Peace of Mind*." And you find it not by believing in a dogma or trusting in a certainty; but you find it, if you follow Sextus Empiricus, by deciding that there is no real absolute or final truth in anything, or, if there is, that it's inaccessible to you.

*Edman*: As a debater's point, Mr. Bryson, we might say that, in a society like our own or like that in the break-up of the Greco-Roman world in which Sextus Empiricus was writing, we have to remind ourselves that there is a temptation, when you have all sorts of winds of doctrine by which you're buffeted about and all sorts of ideas, to say, "Well, I don't know which to believe; perhaps I'll get peace of mind by believing none."

*Barr*: If it is true — and I would agree with your implication that it is true—that we're in a very similar situation—that is, we're in a civilization that shows signs of breaking up—I'm interested by one or two things we do. Within my lifetime the number of people has greatly increased who consider all moral issues reducible to mores—that some people do and some people don't, when you're in Rome do as Romans do, and so on.

*Bryson*: Morality doesn't matter; it's just the way we do things.

*Barr*: It's the way people do. And I detect the same note in Sextus. Mr. Edman, you used the word "semantics." Within the past fifteen years, a vast number of Americans have gotten excited about seman-



tics. I gather they don't know that semantics is a very old science. They think it was invented very recently. But if they get in a tight argument with anybody, at a certain point, when you're just about to get somewhere, they say, "This is a semantic problem." Then they argue that it doesn't matter, and the argument collapses.

*Edman*: We forget the subject matter or the serious involvements into which we get, simply for the sake of being allegedly critically skeptical of the use of words.

*Barr*: Quite!

*Bryson*: Do I detect in what you say, Mr. Barr, a rejection of this way of attaining peace of mind?

*Barr*: I don't know whether "reject" isn't too strong a word. I don't want to be snooty or an unfriendly critic of the book, but Sextus' position fundamentally seems to me too weak to require rejection. It just leaves me a little bit chilly. I don't feel he said a great deal.

*Bryson*: Does any skeptic say anything to you, Mr. Barr?

*Barr*: At times, Hume seems to me to be saying very important things. Or if you mean by skepticism the healthy skepticism that runs through Plato's position at an earlier period, that seems to me imperative to critical thinking. But this man tells me, how can you do critical thinking? There's no criterion.

*Bryson*: No, I don't mean that, Mr. Barr. What I mean is whether or not this man, who offers his doctrine deliberately and explicitly as an escape from the intolerable confusions of his time, can mean anything to us in a confused time when he says you can get peace of mind by not really believing anything, because anything you believe can be matched by its opposite, which has an equally valid claim upon your belief; therefore, he says, let's escape conflicting claims by believing nothing, and that will give us this *ataraxia*, this peace of mind.

*Barr*: More nearly apathy, or *apatheia*. I would have been more convinced if, instead of using words in apparently elaborate arguments (some of which I think are foul arguments, or very poor arguments) and then getting in a jam and saying, "Well, I only mean this in a loose sense," I believe I would have been more convinced if he'd just grunted, because then I'd know that he had nothing to say.

*Bryson*: After all, a grunt is an assertion of essential humanity, Mr. Barr.

*Barr*: And animality. He's a little skeptical of the difference between the human being and the animal.

*Edman*: But certainly, it's a little unfair to say that this book is simply a form of grunting.

*Bryson*: It's a highly civilized grunt, Mr. Edman.

*Edman*: I should say, therefore, a highly civilized grunt says something.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Barr*: I'm guilty of giving an uncivilized grunt in retort, but it doesn't seem to me to be really biting in the way the author thinks it is.

*Edman*: Well, it hasn't the kind of skepticism which is often associated with a genuine humanism and affirmation, as in Montaigne. Montaigne is a skeptic. But it isn't this kind of skepticism, of retreating into a place, supposedly an intellectual place, where nothing means any more than anything else. If you want to call this grunting, I think Sextus does actually come to that. I always feel that there is about most skepticism a double kind of insincerity or hypocrisy. One is an intellectual one. The skeptic doesn't quite mean it himself, or he wouldn't write a book making any assertions. And, secondly, as Sextus says: we might as well follow the customs, the respectabilities of what's going on, because these beliefs are not serious enough to violate; we'll get along better in the world if, on the whole, we're not too critical and don't vary.

*Bryson*: But isn't the skeptic, by the very logic of his position, driven to be a normal conventional person in his outward behaviour? Otherwise, he becomes a cynic and becomes an active dogmatic disbeliever in the time and the customs of his time. So he has to do as Diogenes does. He has to flaunt his differences, and that wouldn't be peace of mind. That wouldn't really be skeptical, would it?

*Edman*: If you really announce skepticism seriously enough, I don't see how you can distinguish it from a dogma, because you're doing propaganda for having no propaganda at all, which is about as far as skepticism can go.

*Barr*: That's the way this book sounds. I think when you read Montaigne, you recognize you're dealing with a skeptic. On the other hand, I never have the impression when I'm reading Montaigne that a grunt would have been a good substitute for his essay. He's saying something that he wants to say, thinks worth saying, and I instantly recognize as worth saying. A lot of communication is occurring. I think very little occurs here.

*Bryson*: Now, that we've abjured the word "semanticism," let me be semantic about this. There are many ways of using the word "skepticism," aren't there? In a sense, Plato himself was a skeptic, or, as you've said, Montaigne is skeptical. All the way through really rigorous thought there runs a vein of skepticism, in the sense that you must question your own ways of getting at the truth. But this is something a little different, and I think we have to say, "This is a particular kind of skepticism," because this man says: We will be skeptic not to get at the truth, but we will be skeptic because the truth is inaccessible and we'll never get at it.

*Edman*: In fact, a characteristic sentence of his, where you expect he's going to say, "What we want is certainty," is, "What we are looking for is quietude." Not certainty, just quietude—just a relief from looking for certitude. In fact, if you take the situation, histori-

cally, in which this kind of thing seems always to appear, it is a time when people feel that if they have a choice between the quietude, almost the lethargy, of not believing, and the violence and fanaticism of action which involves belief—and I think that's very like the situation we're getting into now. But I submit that such skepticism generally leads to reaction, to violence, to propagandas of various sorts. We're told by Sextus that what you get from this sort of skepticism is a suspense of judgment. And that seems to bring peace. But I wonder, Mr. Barr, whether you think it does bring peace?

*Bryson*: It doesn't to Mr. Barr, evidently!

*Barr*: I don't believe it does to human beings in general. I don't believe my reaction is at all unique. I think that where the philosopher abdicates as fully as this man seems to me to abdicate he can expect no response. And note that he's abdicating doubly; he's not merely substituting quietude for certitude. I would settle for less than certitude. If he showed me some indication that he was questing for all the truth that he could get, although he knew at the same time that he would never get more than a slight fragment, I would feel he was a courageous, worth-while operator, philosophically.

*Bryson*: He quite specifically doesn't do that.

*Barr*: He does not do that.

*Bryson*: He says the only way is to abandon the quest.

*Barr*: Exactly. When Socrates disclaims having knowledge, he also insists that he will fight with his mind and his fist for the right to seek truth. But this man doesn't seem to me to be that excited about seeking truth. He is saying, "Since you can't get it, why worry?" And what happens, it seems to me, is that most human beings listening say, "Well then, if we can't have faith in ideas, we'll have faith in ideologies."

*Edman*: Well, just to be the devil's or skeptic's advocate for a moment, mightn't one say that there is at least this saving grace about skepticism—it's an introduction for a good many people to an antidote for dogma? If you can doubt the senses, if you can doubt the interpretation of the senses that reason is supposed to give, at least you'll be a little more suspicious of glib and easy propaganda. I should think, particularly for people just beginning an intellectual or moral or a social or a political career, a dose of this kind of skepticism is rather salutary.

*Barr*: May I suggest an alternative that seems to me a healthier introduction? One of my friends reported to me that in a certain laboratory they were trying some experiments on the diet of rats. And they first analyzed as best they could all the things that a rat requires to be healthy. Then they dissected out of various foodstuffs all the items, vitamins and what not, that existed, they thought, in good rat food. And then they fed them separately to the rats, and the rats died. Now, it seems to me that if the mind feeds on a writer like

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Plato, where skepticism is interwoven with the urgency of learning and understanding, where *skepsis* or inquiry has all of its original meaning, that then the *skepsis* part, the uncertainty and the intellectual modesty and the recognition that the senses can trick us and the mind can trick us, is healthy. But when it's taken out and fed to you singly like this, I believe it becomes a kind of poison.

*Edman*: What you're saying then is that when skepticism is a method, rather than an end, or where it's part of a larger method, a phase of criticism and inquiry, then it would be healthy.

*Barr*: That would be my position.

*Bryson*: There's another way of reconciling the point of view that you two gentlemen have, Mr. Barr, and that is that skepticism, introduced into the education of a young man who is forming his mind, when he is going through successive experiences with different points of view, might be extremely useful to jar him out of the normal human desire for certainty. But for an adult who's trying to live in a troubled world, skepticism is a broken reed. The richer and more complete point of view of a man like Plato, who uses skepticism as a method rather than, as Mr. Edman says as an end in itself, is a far stronger reliance. We would have a young person (or any person who was trying to educate himself) read Sextus Empiricus, but we would not have him take it as a philosophy. We'd not say, "This will get you out of the present world," because peace of mind is not to be arrived at this way.

*Edman*: Isn't it illuminating, perhaps, that this was offered really not as a serious intellectual instrument so much as a moral anodyne, along with other things?

*Bryson*: For peace of mind, Mr. Edman?

*Edman*: Yes. Here were the stoics; here were various mystical sects, with a sort of life insurance on immortality; there was the spread of what was then a new thing in the world, Christian doctrine—various appeals to people in a world that was troubled, in which social life was breaking down and personal life was extremely insecure. And, it was thought, if you could just retreat far enough into yourself and have doubts about everything, you'd be at peace. I agree with Mr. Barr and with you, Mr. Bryson, that you don't get peace of mind that way, but get a kind of deliberate attempt at self-narcosis, which never is achieved anyway.

*Bryson*: Another aspect of this, Mr. Edman, that seems to me of enormous importance to us now when we're thinking of a parallel with our own time, is that—I think Mr. Barr indicated this a while ago—there is a tendency in what you can, with complete respect call the normal man, the man who hasn't had a great deal of deliberate experience with the thinking of the past, to retreat from the uncertainties and pressures of a time like this, not into a peace of mind by suspense of judgment, but to the passionate embrace of a dogma and to

violence as a way of getting rid of the tensions. Isn't it true that, in the time of Sextus Empiricus, you had a great deal of violence and reckless enthusiasm like that which we can see all around us today. And if you come to a time when you can't believe in something which has a carefully thought out reason behind it, you slip—as you say, Mr. Barr—into an ideology, and that leads to wars, revolutions, violence.

*Barr*: It leads to irrational behaviour generally, it seems to me just as you frequently find in an individual that great brutality goes with great sentimentality—a kind of schizophrenia.

*Bryson*: They go together.

*Barr*: If you get this abdication we're speaking of on the part of the thinking man, then you get the outburst of violence that is the rest of man's equipment; and you get them separate, where you ought to have them together. That is, if the violent impulses were coordinated with good skeptical inquiry, in the platonic sense of *skepsis* and search, then you'd get steam in the boiler and at the same time something to guide the engine when the boiler was full with steam.

*Edman*: At that point skepticism really becomes a critical control of energies doesn't it?

*Barr*: Yes.

*Edman*: It's a way of preventing us from going mad. Santayana had a wonderful sentence, in which he said: "The normal man holds a lunatic in leash." Well, we might say that skepticism in the form of enlightened criticism is a way of preventing us from going mad. But Sextus Empiricus gives you as an ideal of normal man not a lunatic held in leash, but a moron half-awake.

*Bryson*: And the lunatic is put to sleep by a process of logical thought! It seems a little unlikely, doesn't it? But are there temperaments to whom that could happen, Mr. Edman? Are there people so philosophic in mind that they can get this peace, or—if we want to drop Dr. Liebman's phrase and take Harry Overstreet's—"arrive at maturity" by this method?

*Edman*: Not by self-narcosis. I think the people who take this message seriously are in psychiatric wards in hospitals, suffering from what used to be called anhedonia, where nothing matters more than anything else.

*Barr*: And that leaves the other kind of lunatic to take over.

*Edman*: You have fanaticism or nothing.

*Bryson*: Is there any way to make those people who are skeptics useful to the rest of our civilization by using them as correctives to the enthusiasts and the violent?

*Edman*: Perhaps in the way that Socrates was becoming a critical gadfly, but that passes from skepticism to something else. It's a critical questioning of what is conventionally accepted in the world; but

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there is commitment, as Mr. Barr was saying, to the search for truth and love of wisdom.

*Barr*: Even a gadfly has to be committed to something.

*Bryson*: To what, Mr. Barr?

*Barr*: I suppose to biting horses. This man doesn't even do that, it seems to me. He feels that biting is sort of excitve occupation.

*Edman*: And he just wants to escape being bitten.

*Barr*: Well, he sits on the horse's rump and gets a ride.

*Bryson*: Who drives the horse in that case?

*Barr*: The horse drives himself, as you are now witnessing.

*Bryson*: And so the war horse goes ahead, with his mane flying, and gets us into trouble, and the skeptic lands, in disaster, along with the rest of us. Could he have prevented it, if he had been broader in his position, or are we helpless in a time like this?

*Barr*: Well, we may be helpless to stop the runaway horse, but one would like to make a more graceful exit than sitting on the rump of a runaway horse, doing nothing except having apathy.

*Edman*: Just to approach skepticism defensively for a moment—at least the skeptic tries to prevent us from being taken for a ride—to mix metaphor still further.

*Bryson*: Both metaphors, I should say, are highly applicable to a time like this. Humanity may be taking itself for a ride.

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# DAVID HUME

## An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding

GEORGE BOAS

• IRWIN EDMAN •

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: This book is an interesting example of man's attempt to explain to the world what he thought. In his middle twenties, Hume wrote one of the great masterpieces of modern philosophy—if I can use the adjective "great" in the presence of two philosophers—and then, finding that nobody paid any attention to it, as he grew older and became a more or less popular writer of historical works, he decided he would explain his own work to the world. So he wrote the *Enquiry* to explain the *Treatise*. He wasn't a complete skeptic. He has been called one of the most important of modern philosophers. Why is he important today? Why is the skeptical attitude—even the reasonable skeptical attitude—of Hume important today?

*Boas*: I should say that it is precisely what the American public needs at the present time, Mr. Bryson. In our two hundred or more years of existence we've never been faced with such a wave of intolerance and authoritarianism.

*Bryson*: In ourselves, Mr. Boas?

*Boas*: In ourselves and in the country at large. More arguments have probably been presented to the American public, particularly to the educated public, to turn away from self-examination and the scrutiny of our ideas than ever before.

*Edman*: And in that sense the skepticism about dogmatism that Hume's essays and larger works are famous for is a healthy symptom. But I think there is something far more important than simply this quality of skeptical critique in Hume. He really began to give the foundation for a modern technique of criticism. As a matter of fact,

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he himself is extremely suspicious of the kind of skepticism that Sextus Empiricus in the ancient world represents.

*Bryson:* Last week, Mr. Edman, when we discussed Sextus as the man who is a complete skeptic, we were left with the idea, I think, as expressed in your words, that this was something that was good to understand, but that it didn't provide you with any real basis for an attitude toward life or knowledge. You had to get something beyond that. Now, does Hume give you the thing beyond?

*Edman:* I think he does. I think it's important to see that he distinguished himself from that kind of skepticism. We take a passage of his in this book. He says: A complete skeptic "cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the human mind or, if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action, would immediately cease, and men would remain in a total lethargy till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. It is true, so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principles and, though a Pyrrhonian or a skeptic may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion in his profound reasoning, the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his doubts and scruples."

*Boas:* Don't you think that the "putting to flight of all doubts and scruples" is precisely what we may be in great need of at the present time?

*Edman:* But, putting his doubts and scruples into circulation again, you see they were doubts and scruples against what he took to be, quite properly, certain rigid assumptions that had commonly been made about knowledge.

*Bryson:* About knowledge, now, not about life?

*Edman:* No, about knowledge.

*Bryson:* This is not his morals. This is his method.

*Edman:* Just his method. There have been two assumptions current for several hundred years. Within what is commonly called the rationalistic tradition, a tradition about the nature of reason or reasonableness in the universe, the assumption was made by Descartes that, if you retreated sufficiently to a certain elementary point of retreat you could be certain; and, also, if you went further, you could find a universe that was consistent.

*Boas:* That's very true, and I think that one of the great contributions of Hume to the twentieth century mind is precisely the liberating influence which this kind of modified skepticism—which is really self-criticism—gives us.

*Bryson:* Liberating from what, Mr. Boas?



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*Boas*: I think it liberates us from a number of things—not merely from dogmatism and authoritarianism, from which, heaven knows, we need to be liberated, but also liberation from tradition in the sense of unexamined tradition. It seems to me that when you read Hume's *Enquiry*—at least this was my experience as an undergraduate—you're in a frame of mind where you're given a technique for self-criticism and for the criticism of your ideas. And that, I found at the time, was extremely valuable. It seemed to me that I had some way of looking at my ideas and asking myself on what grounds I really believed these things.

*Bryson*: And when you are led to look at what you believe, at your prejudices or even your convictions, Mr. Boas—what's the advantage of that? I can see an advantage in the method to avoid error. But suppose you're right! Have you gained anything by looking at a conviction that you reestablish in your mind the more firmly because you have looked at it as close as you can?

*Boas*: As far as I can see, the only advantage of it is self-knowledge.

*Bryson*: And that is of value to Hume?

*Boas*: It's of value to Hume, as it was to some of his French predecessors like Montaigne.

*Bryson*: Is it to us?

*Boas*: Wouldn't you think so, Mr. Edman?

*Edman*: We're talking about the great world?

*Bryson*: I'm talking about the great world, and Mr. Boas said, Mr. Edman, that this kind of self-examination is very much needed now. I'm completely in agreement that it is very much needed now, but I want to pin down why.

*Edman*: It's very curious—I think Mr. Boas might agree in one way—to use the term "self-knowledge" in connection with Hume, because "self" was exactly one of the things that Hume questioned whether we could know in any important sense. He thought we could become critical of our knowledge of the external world, of our knowledge of nature, by an examination of the human nature through which we got that. But, surely, you don't regard Hume as a kind of retiring soliloquist!

*Boas*: Far from it, because I think he identifies himself with human nature in general, and I think that that part of the self that he's interested in, in the book that we're examining today, is precisely human understanding. So, he is thinking of the self as I am—as a self, possessing a set of ideas which, when unexamined, no matter how true they are, are nothing but received opinion.

*Bryson*: Mr. Edman said a moment ago that people demanded of their knowledge certainty and consistency, and that they were liberated from this demand by Hume because they no longer had to be

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certain and no longer felt they had to be consistent. Where does that lead them in the matter of knowledge?

*Boas*: Something even stronger than consistency, a term that is more characteristic of Hume, of course, is the term, "necessity," and the idea that whatever order one found in nature was logically necessary order, and that this determined the eternal interconnections of things. On that basis it was assumed that you could know the self, you could know substance, you could know things, and you could know the permanent eternal relations of cause and effect.

*Bryson*: And Hume doubted that?

*Boas*: Well, Hume said quite simply that nothing in your experience would ever reveal to you that there was a self, that there were things, that there was cause and effect. The reason you thought so were certain habits in human nature, habits of repeated contiguity, repeated resemblance, and repeated apparent cause or relation; but they weren't necessary; they were simply the order that regularly recurred in our knowledge.

*Bryson*: Well, isn't "habit," before Hume as well as after Hume, a sort of derogatory word in common parlance. We say, "Well, it's mere habit," or "it's just habit." It isn't something else. And Hume is questioning whether there is anything else but habitual experience that gives us attitudes towards the universe or nature based upon that experience. Is that right?

*Boas*: I think this was one of the great discoveries of Hume—if it is his discovery, and I think it is—namely, that what you've got to do first is to investigate the psychological sources of our knowledge, and that, even if we set up scientific laws, we had better find out why we ourselves set them up, and what there is in us to make us do so.

*Bryson*: Why they seem to us convincing?

*Boas*: Yes. And I think that his emphasis upon habit and custom as sources of knowledge was probably one of the most illuminating things that any philosopher of his time did. I also think, quite frankly, it was one of the reasons why Hume was never appreciated in the England of his time, because it was such an innovation. People thought it must be just one of his boutades; it was just a witty saying that he was permitting himself.

*Bryson*: They did call him French, didn't they? They dismissed him as an outsider, and an alien?

*Boas*: Yes!

*Bryson*: He wasn't English to somebody like Sam Johnson?

*Boas*: Right!

*Bryson*: Therefore, he couldn't amount to anything. Was that because he frightened them a little bit, Mr. Boas?

*Boas*: No, I think it was because he was too brilliant and wrote too well.

*Edman*: That's part of the reason. I think one of the reasons Dr. Johnson distrusted him was because Dr. Johnson had a Toryism that was mistaken for common sense, and, when you had uncommonly common sense on the part of Hume, it seemed a little dangerous, flip-pant, and French.

*Boas*: But, Mr. Edman, don't you think that a Tory like Johnson should have appreciated a man who gave such price to habit and tradition?

*Edman*: Yes, but the price he gave to habit and tradition was in order to overcome certain other habits and traditions, including reliance on the old standbys of a universally ordered and reasonable world, and on the logical necessity in the arrangement of things. Well, when you can't know the self, and, when you can't be sure that "B" must follow "A", it certainly would upset, I should think, a Tory like Johnson.

*Bryson*: But if he establishes habit, Mr. Edman, as the creative agent in the mind—perhaps that is overstating the case—does he go on, then, and say anything about the nature of knowledge which is possible through the habits of our mind?

*Edman*: He certainly does, and out of it, it seems to me, comes the whole critical tradition of modern science and the philosophy of science. He says what you get is not certainty, or necessity, or consistency, but probability. And, if you have certain expectations that are repeatedly fulfilled, there's no necessary guarantee they're going to be fulfilled again, but, in experience, it's reasonable or sensible or "common sensible" to assume that these conjunctions are going to be repeated. Habit has taught you that in the past, and it leads you, in the popular sense of the word, to a reasonable expectation in the future. It seems to me that out of that has come the whole operational notion of statistical probability of modern science. You operate with what you repeatedly find, and you build your expectations modestly and tentatively upon those.

*Bryson*: Well, then, common sense is no guide to the nature of the universe, but a good guide to conduct and daily behavior?

*Edman*: Well, you know about the universe, but you may not even know that, in the old sense, there *is* one, according to Hume.

*Boas*: And, of course, it would be a matter of supreme indifference to Hume whether there was any universe or not, because he's talking about knowledge. He's not writing metaphysics.

*Bryson*: Mr. Boas, isn't that one of the reasons why he was so neglected and so feared? Because the implication is that this is an attack upon all kinds of religious and metaphysical beliefs that people confused with common sense. Isn't that right?

*Boas*: I think there can be no doubt about that. Hume himself, of course, was aware of how dangerous many of his beliefs would be to established religion. There's no sense in trying to avoid that fact.

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I think that Hume's greatest influence was not, however, in the field of religion or metaphysics but, as Mr. Edman has said, in the field of scientific method. You have a brand new attitude toward knowledge when you follow Hume. If we just took these two items—his emphasis upon habit and custom as formulative of, or at least productive of, certain of our ideas, and his emphasis upon probability rather than certainty—it seems to me we would have a very great man writing in the middle of the eighteenth century, for, surely, no one had given any serious attention to probability up to that time.

*Edman:* Didn't he also make a contribution—perhaps one that we may be beginning to have certain reservations about in the sense that it's overdone—in that he was the first, explicitly, when he was writing about knowledge, to start with human nature? As a matter of fact, a larger work of which this was a reduction and a popularization, is called *Treatise on Human Nature*, and Hume says in effect, and says explicitly: if you wish to understand how we know, you mustn't examine the universe or substance or things, but you must understand first the human nature, the forces, the tendencies of association and stubborn resemblance and contiguity which we have in our knowledge. He was the first, one might say, whom modern psychologists acknowledge.

*Boas:* Mr. Edman, it seems to me that it's precisely in those insights that Hume has contributed so much. I mean, he's one of the first people to say that knowledge is a human affair. It's not simply a reflection of some external and alien world. It's something we do to the world. To be sure, it's something we receive in our impressions from the world, but, nevertheless, we organize it in accordance with our own laws. The liberation of knowledge from a rigid framework such as you've got in medieval logic seems to me to have been a tremendous innovation.

*Bryson:* And it also led, did it not, Mr. Boas, into German idealism?

*Boas:* That was one of its least fortunate effects.

*Bryson:* You think that what Immanuel Kant did with it was not fair to Hume or fair to the universe?

*Boas:* I think it was fair enough to Hume, but I think it was unfair to his successors.

*Edman:* But it's important to remind ourselves what Kant meant by saying that Hume had awakened him from his dogmatic slumber, and what the dogmas were from which he thought he had been awakened—the dogmas of these tight, logically consistent theodicies and rationalisms of the Continent. He was awakened to see that, whatever our experience was, it was in our modes of knowing the world that knowledge came to be. Now, Kant went from that to some new dogmatisms of his own, as if human nature legislated to the world what it should look like and that this was the way we know things in terms of the human nature with which we operate.

*Bryson*: Note this way—therefore the world has to look like this to us?

*Edman*: Kant said that, too, and he learned that from Hume. But he drew different conclusions. He said the fact that it looked that way was proof that the real world couldn't possibly be that way, and Hume came to no such commitment.

*Bryson*: Well, he just grew agnostic at that point, didn't he? He was completely skeptical as to the nature of the external world, was he not?

*Boas*: I don't know that he was completely skeptical, but I think we're overlooking the title, which is *An Enquiry*, and I think that the word "enquiry" is the important thing here.

*Bryson*: It's a step down from "treatise."

*Boas*: Exactly! He'd stepped down from the *Treatise*, where he was pretty dogmatic at times, and rather "sassy" as a matter of fact. In this book he's just raising certain questions.

*Bryson*: Oh, but that sassy quality is one of the reasons why he, among philosophers, is so much fun to read, Mr. Boas. He's one of the great lucid, witty philosophers, most of whom were either Irishmen or Scotchmen.

*Edman*: Or Greeks.

*Bryson*: Well, I'm talking about those that wrote the English language, Mr. Edman. What is Hume's relation to modern science? You said, Mr. Boas, that this is a man who would be very good for us today, if we could take him and let him exert his curative powers on our dogmatism and authoritarianism. He is also very close to modern science, isn't he—to the particular, or the positivistic attitudes of modern science?

*Edman*: Yes, though perhaps not all forms of positivism. As a matter of fact, I'm rather inclined to think that the *Enquiry* is of greater value to the student of philosophy than it is to the student of science. It seems to me that at the present time, if you have a book that's beautifully written as this is, and very persuasively written, you have a book that the students of philosophy will be willing to read and, consequently, may find themselves confronted with certain questions which they ought to have put to themselves.

*Bryson*: Like what?

*Edman*: The questions? Well, the questions of Kant, I suppose—What can I know?

*Bryson*: What can I know, and what can I do with what I know?

*Edman*: I think one other matter that we haven't mentioned very often and that ought to be brought in to this discussion, is the fact that Hume, in whatever way he conceived experience—and he practically reduced experience to immediate impressions—was trying to

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say: let's not go beyond what our experience actually gives us reason for expecting, for being able to deal with in a practical way. And, in one sense, to return to Mr. Boas' early point, I do think that Hume was agitating a good deal of the modern notion of self-knowledge: see what you're actually given. What you're given, Hume thought, were impressions; those impressions were immediate, and were the foundation of many more elaborate ideas or systems of ideas.

*Bryson:* The point you have both made, Mr. Edman, it seems to me, is of very great importance: that Hume's type of skepticism doesn't lead you to inaction or an unwillingness to live by the rules, by the morals and beliefs, or the attitudes, of your time and place; rather, it makes you a good citizen a little more aware of yourself than others and a little less given to traditions and authoritarianism.

*Edman:* I should think that was certainly true. Hume himself lived a conventional, perhaps cautious, life, devoting himself more to the study of history, really, than to the study of philosophy.

*Bryson:* Is that because, in his earlier attempt to be a philosopher, nobody paid any attention to him?

*Edman:* That's quite right! Also, his interest in custom and habit and tradition was probably a thing that made him examine the customs and habits of traditions of his own nation. He was really suggesting a critical habit of action rather than a skeptical flight from action.

*Bryson:* I think in many ways he was a good Scot. He lived a timid, economical life, but in his mind he reached after ultimate truth.

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# LUCIAN

## Dialogues of the Dead

CLIFTON FADIMAN • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Lucian is one of those men whose writings used to be part of every gentleman's education, but who has dropped out of our attention except as a name and as a representative of one aspect of the ancient world. We associate him, I think falsely, with a rather reckless, and perhaps even risqué, way of tearing great people apart. I find that that is not quite his quality.

*Fadiman:* Perhaps he was an exploiter of somewhat advanced but still more or less accepted ideas, Mr. Bryson. He represented a kind of vanguard of thought, but he was not an experimentalist or a rebel in the sense of being a profound changer of men's ideas.

*Bryson:* You don't think he shocked his contemporaries, Mr. Fadiman?

*Fadiman:* I don't think so, even though his reputation would seem to indicate that he did. We speak of him as "Lucian the Scoffer."

*Michalopoulos:* I don't think he even really wanted to tear people apart, Mr. Fadiman. He just liked to indulge in witticisms as a form of humor. As for his being a scoffer, I don't know that he was really a scoffer. He liked to attack generally accepted ideas.

*Bryson:* Well, he did attack the gods, Mr. Michalopoulos, and that indicates either something about Lucian, or something about the second century A.D.

*Fadiman:* I think he attacked the gods when their prestige had already waned in the minds of most people. It was fairly safe to do. The thing we must determine, it seems to me, is not whether or not he was a rebel—I don't think he was—but whether or not he attacked things in a wittier or more amusing way than his contemporaries did.

*Michalopoulos:* This question of attacking the gods is not a question of the second century A.D. only. I don't think the Greeks ever took the Olympian gods very seriously. That is a belief that I've always had.

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*Bryson*: At least the intellectuals didn't!

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, I think even the common people of Athens did not.

*Bryson*: You don't think the people in the villages ever did?

*Michalopoulos*: No.

*Bryson*: Not even the little gods?

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, that's a different thing. I'm talking about the Olympian gods. They were never taken seriously; and that was Aeschylus' great trouble. Aeschylus tried to build up a monotheism based on the paternal deity of Zeus.

*Bryson*: But, Mr. Michalopoulos, Lucian comes six hundred years later. Political power has shifted from Athens to Rome. And still the gods are worth making fun of. They must have had some vitality.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, this is what Lucian himself says: When I was a boy and listened to Homer, and to Hesiod's tales about adulterous gods, rapacious gods, violent, litigious, usurping, incestuous gods, I found it all quite proper and intensely interesting; but, when I grew up, I found that the laws contradicted the poets, forbidding adultery, sedition, and rapacity; so I was in a very hazy state of mind.

*Bryson*: And out of that he made a literary career!

*Fadiman*: Perhaps it was an easy thing to exploit the gods commercially—to tear them down, to have the gods talk like ordinary women, to place them in Hades, to have them use what I presume must have been slang phrases in Lucian's Greek. Satirists have always done that and always will; that is, take people in positions of authority and make them talk like you and me. It flatters our democratic instinct.

*Bryson*: But consider for a moment when this was, Mr. Fadiman—two hundred years after Christ. This was contemporary with Marcus Aurelius. This was the time when Rome was mistress of the world. What did people believe in if they had lost their faith in the gods? It was before Christianity had taken over.

*Fadiman*: Well, that brings us to another point in connection with Lucian. Not only does he attack the Greek gods, in whom perhaps people had ceased to believe, but he arraigned the various philosophic schools which had taken the place of the gods. During the second century, and for a century or two thereafter, people made choices, as it were, among philosophic faiths—the Epicurean faith, for instance, or the Stoic faith, or the remnants of the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines, or the various Oriental cults that began to infiltrate from Asia Minor (Lucian hauls those over the coals, too). Not only does he make fun of Zeus and the regulation pantheon, but he makes fun of Diogenes.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, not quite! I think he rather likes Diogenes.

*Fadiman*: He likes the Stoics, but he does take them apart every once in a while. Similarly, he makes fun of Pythagoras, of Pythagoras' theory of numbers, and Pythagoras' vegetarianism.



*Bryson*: Marcus Aurelius, who tried to carry the burdens of the Roman Empire at this time, seems to have found Stoicism a very satisfactory faith. And Marcus Aurelius, like Lucian, certainly rejected the Christianity that was coming along.

*Fadiman*: Yes, he did—as, indeed, most people did at that time. We must remember that this was some time before Constantine, before Christianity became the state religion. It was the conventional thing at that time to attack Christianity. I think we must be fair to Lucian, however, and admit that his attack on Christianity is a glancing one.

*Michalopoulos*: I don't think there was any real attack on Christianity in Lucian. I think that is a libel of the historian Suidas, who took him to task for that.

*Fadiman*: Well, Lucian speaks of Christianity very lightly on occasion.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, but he spoke so much more heavily, so to speak, of others, that I think his real quarrel is with what he would call "bogus philosophers." There was a whole tribe of people wandering about, teaching various cults and philosophies, who were not really qualified to do so. It is not so much with the heads of the philosophical schools that he quarrels, as with these frauds. Lucian's philosopher always goes about begging; he's always got his staff; he always goes in rags because he wants to pretend that he's poor; he always has a long beard—the long beard comes in incessantly in Lucian's descriptions of the philosophers.

*Fadiman*: Still, he does make fun of Socrates in one of the dialogues.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, quite nicely!

*Bryson*: It was in the satiric tradition, Mr. Fadiman, to make fun of Socrates. But it's interesting to note that in what little we know about this man—he spent very little time in Rome—he is an example of the extent to which the Greek and Roman civilization spread all around the Mediterranean. Here's a man, born a Syrian. He was educated in Athens. He spent quite a lot of his literary career in Athens.

*Michalopoulos*: He spent the middle part of his life, between his fortieth and fiftieth years, in Athens—the time when he was writing.

*Bryson*: That's right. But he spent a lot of time over in what we now think of as France, at the other end of the Mediterranean. The man wandered all over, in a perfectly safe world, wherever ideas were interesting; and he made his living in the early part of his life as what they called a "rhetorician." I suppose we would call him a lawyer.

*Fadiman*: Yes. He would prepare a brief for either side in cases involving litigation, and his experience in doing that stood him in good stead when he started to write semi-philosophical dialogues, where also he would arrange the arguments pro and con, just as a lawyer preparing a brief might do.

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*Michalopoulos*: And he'd do that in a very witty and humorous way.

*Fadiman*: Well, I should say in a mildly entertaining, rather than a witty, way.

*Bryson*: But the purpose was entertainment, wasn't it? It wasn't philosophy. It was to be entertainment; and it was to show up, to use your phrase, the bogus people of his time. He read these things in public. He presented himself as somebody who could arouse public interest and entertain at the same time. There's no position in the modern world quite comparable.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I don't know. I think one must bear in mind that his works were probably not very much read. They were listened to. I mean, he gave entertainment. The nearest thing to it now would be a radio comedian, perhaps, or something between a radio comedian and a radio commentator.

*Fadiman*: Or perhaps a popular lecturer, who takes some of the accepted ideas of his time and goes around making a living by re-expressing them.

*Michalopoulos*: Of course, Lucian was really knocking them down rather than re-expressing them.

*Bryson*: But not knocking them down, as Mr. Fadiman said a minute ago, in a very tragic or drastic way.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, no! Amusingly! Just for fun.

*Bryson*: He made fun of the solemnities that people no longer thought very solemn. Did he have a purpose in this? A great modern philosopher who doesn't seem to me to exemplify it—therefore, I won't name him—says the ideal mental condition is a serious purpose and a light manner. Now, this man certainly had the light manner. Did he have the serious purpose?

*Michalopoulos*: I doubt if his purpose was very serious. But, if there was a purpose, it was a sort of glorification of the ordinary man. You remember, on several occasions he says that Hades, with which he deals a lot in *Dialogues of the Dead*, is the only place that is really democratic. And, you remember, when Menippus goes down and sees Tiresias, the old prophet, and asks him what is the best life, he comes away with this: "The life of the ordinary man is the best and most prudent choice; cease from the folly of the metaphysical speculation and inquiry into origins and ends, utterly reject their clever logic, count all these things idle talk, and pursue one end alone—how you may do what your hand finds to do, and go your way with ever a smile and never a passion."

*Fadiman*: Remember, though, that would have been the pleasing and acceptable thing to say. Most human beings in those days were poor and had a hard time making a living. It was very pleasant for them to be told that it was not important to be great, to be a king, to be rich, to be glorious, or to be magnificent, but that they, pursuing their ordinary paths of life, could achieve virtue and goodness without the trappings of power.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, I think that's rather nice!

*Fadiman*: So did I! It is a truism. But the point is that the popularity of Lucian depended upon his re-expressing those truisms which made people feel happy and comfortable inside.

*Michalopoulos*: That's what makes a lecturer or a commentator popular today.

*Fadiman*: But it is not what makes a thinker.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, no!

*Bryson*: I think, Mr. Fadiman, that's the point there. He's no more a thinker than a popular lecturer or broadcaster is likely to be today. He's not somebody who jars or who startles people with new ideas, but somebody who reassures them about their own inadequacies and tells them that they're pretty important because they are the common people of the world, and also gives them nothing that surprises their common sense. Is that because he didn't have anything of the sort to say?

*Michalopoulos*: How do you mean? No profound ideas?

*Fadiman*: I can find none.

*Bryson*: This man is just a shallow, entertaining stylist? How has he lasted eighteen hundred years?

*Fadiman*: I ask myself that same question.

*Michalopoulos*: I think there's one answer. His style in Greek is extremely pleasant. It's not deep. If you want to go into the question of what makes style, I suppose you have to admit there's no great thought or character behind it, and, therefore, it isn't great style. Great style can only be a style that reflects thought, and there's not very much thought here. But he's pleasant. He's extremely pleasant.

*Bryson*: Now, Mr. Michalopoulos, you're a Greek, and you read Lucian with full appreciation of the subtlety and wit that he has. But I don't believe that the British schoolboy, who is trying to make a gentleman of himself by learning to read Lucian along with Horace, or the person who reads him in translation, gets very much.

*Michalopoulos*: The British schoolboy isn't allowed to read him. He's not allowed to read anything that's not from the Fifth Century B.C.

*Bryson*: He used to be! A hundred years ago Lucian was part of the education of the British gentleman, wasn't he?

*Michalopoulos*: Was he a hundred years ago?

*Bryson*: Well, a hundred and fifty.

*Michalopoulos*: He wasn't forty years ago when I was a boy.

*Bryson*: No, but you don't go back a hundred and fifty years.

*Fadiman*: Well, I would like to take the position that there is very little in Lucian—in English—that is worthwhile for the general reader.

*Bryson*: Let's stick to that point, Mr. Fadiman. What about him in English?

*Fadiman*: Well, I find the stuff extremely mild. *Dialogues of the Dead*, which was the required reading for this week, Mr. Bryson,

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seem to me among the most inferior of his works, as a matter of fact. They are little dialogues hardly more than a page in length, in which the gods and some of the great men of antique Greece are placed in Hades, or on their way to Hades, and are made to discuss various philosophical matters. The only point that he makes in these dialogues, and there are perhaps thirty of them, is that even the great are equal after death. "The paths of glory," said Gray, "lead but to the grave." I think that Gray said it much more dramatically than Lucian ever did.

*Bryson*: Well, he has one little joke that he goes through over and over again, and that is the joke on the man who tries so to manipulate some dying old rich man that he'll get his fortune; and he finds himself in Hades while the rich old man is still on earth.

*Fadiman*: That brings us to one of the points that is interesting in Lucian, though perhaps only historically—his ability to select and lampoon certain types of the period: the legacy-hunter for one, and the old man who amasses money for no reason and finds after his death that it's all been futile vanity.

*Michalopoulos*: There's a wonderful story about the two rich ship-owners. Being a shipowner was one of the sources of great wealth in Greece then, as it is today. There were two rich shipowners who were cousins, and they had amassed an enormous fortune. They were always betting with each other about who would die first; and then they died on the same day, at sea, and their fortune passed to insignificant people.

*Fadiman*: As a lampooner of certain popular types of the period, I think he's mildly interesting. Of course, we get to know what kind of types there were in those days.

*Bryson*: And they are not types particularly familiar to us.

*Fadiman*: Well, I think perhaps greed and materialism are universal.

*Bryson*: What I mean is that they take different forms.

*Fadiman*: They do take different forms.

*Bryson*: And part of the interest in reading Lucian, even though you read him in English and miss the sparkle of his style, is that there were no novels, there were no descriptive books of that time. If you want to know how people lived at that time, this is one of the ways to find out.

*Fadiman*: But he had no grasp of character. You don't know what human beings were really like from Lucian. All you get is a general idea of the currents of opinion of that time, which he personifies in his characters, whoever they may be. He's not a dramatist.

*Bryson*: Not a real one, no!

*Fadiman*: Whereas the characters in Aristophanes are human beings who stand up twenty-five hundred years after.

*Michalopoulos*: There's no comparison.

*Fadiman*: He gives us a sense of what certain Greeks were like; but you cannot get that sense from Lucian. You can only get a notion of what certain popular ideas were like.

*Michalopoulos*: You get certain bits which are descriptive of places. For instance, you get a very good description of Athens in the *Nigrinus*, which is not within these *Dialogues*. There he says what the Athenian people were like at that time.

*Bryson*: Well, taking the whole scope of his work, Mr. Michalopoulos, does he give us very much in the way of actual pictures?

*Michalopoulos*: He gives you a very good picture of Athens, of which he was very fond. He shows you how it had become a university town of good taste, a town where any Roman who came there with a great retinue, who was wearing purple robes and gold wreaths, would, after a few days, be made to take them off. He'd be shamed into it by the Athenians who wouldn't say anything, wouldn't be rude to him, but be scornfully tolerant of him.

*Fadiman*: That is one of the neatest things he ever wrote.

*Michalopoulos*: It seems to me a very beautiful description.

*Fadiman*: I do think that, while we are speaking favorably of Lucian for a moment, it's only fair to point out that he is important to us in another way: That is, as the inventor of certain forms which have been developed since his time. For example, the familiar essay, now commonplace in our literature, and which rose to its height in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, was started by Lucian. The use of the familiar style—the "I" talking to the "you" in simple language almost as if he were talking across the table as we are—was a relatively new thing in Greek literature at that time. The familiar essay is an invention of Lucian's. Similarly, he took the profound philosophical dialogue of Plato, married it to the satire and comedy of Aristophanes, and presented us with what we now know as the comic or satiric dialogue. Our light drawing-room comedy is an outgrowth of this. Another thing which might be of some interest is that he was the inventor, of what we now call science fiction. In one of his more amusing pieces called *The True History*, he conceived the notion of planetary warfare. He has his hero get into strange countries and on strange planets and observe strange wars, using strange vehicles, and so on.

*Michalopoulos*: Jules Verne and Buck Rogers?

*Fadiman*: Yes. He was the inventor of all these forms, although he didn't know he was the inventor of them; and I think for that reason we should be grateful to him. Others have developed these forms, I think, much more thoroughly.

*Michalopoulos*: Should we be grateful for that particularly? Do you like Buck Rogers?

*Fadiman*: I like science fiction. I consider it a quite important form of art. Sometime we might have a discussion about it.

*Bryson*: As a matter of fact, it's a form that has persisted and has been very useful to satirists. Perhaps it is a comment on our times that it's not used for satire today, but for what is supposed to be serious comment.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes!

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*Bryson:* Lucian didn't have the advantage of the stage; that was acting. He didn't have the advantage of the printing press. He had to go around and read his own stuff. He couldn't make comics out of it; but he did have the central ideas. Yet he wasn't a great writer. Isn't it interesting that his age, one of the greatest periods in history—many people have said this is the time when man lived at the very top of the possibilities of human achievement—produced almost no great writers. After all, Sextus Empiricus didn't amount to much. Marcus Aurelius was not a greater writer, but a great man who wrote. This man Lucian isn't a great writer. Does he last? Does wit last? Does mere topical comment mean anything?

*Michalopoulos:* I think the answer to that is that his works now take up about eight volumes; and you cannot possibly read the eight volumes.

*Bryson:* They're just unreadable?

*Michalopoulos:* You can't take the eight volumes and read through them. But you can take bits of the work and read them and get a certain stimulation.

*Fadiman:* You have to select very carefully.

*Michalopoulos:* Oh, I don't know!

*Bryson:* But now, can you project him into our time? Who is he most like?

*Fadiman:* To my mind, the man he most resembles is H. L. Mencken, although I think Mencken is a far better writer, a much more profound thinker, and a greater wit. But Lucian has the same—if I may employ the word we've been using—"scoffing" attitude that Mencken had in his early days. He did attack some of the tin gods of the time, as Mencken did; and also, by the way, he had the same interest in words that Mr. Mencken has. He wrote many essays dealing with lexicography.

*Michalopoulos:* That's very true. But to me he recalls Anatole France in many ways. That again would seem to be a blasphemy against Anatole France, who is a deeper thinker. But they both have something of the same spirit. I mean a sort of light intellectual scoffing without any great depths, without any great philosophical content. Anatole France's theme is, after all, the vanity of things in general.

*Bryson:* But I suspect, Mr. Michalopoulos, that there is a type of wit of which Lucian is a very good example, and of which Aristophanes is not. That is a wit that is so closely related to the affairs of the day, so "popular" in the right meaning of that word, so much just what people enjoy hearing, that, when times change and change profoundly, it loses so much of its salt that you try to find something there in vain.

*Fadiman:* Perhaps another way of putting it is that Lucian had no passion. Aristophanes had passion; for comic passion is a kind of passion, too.

*Bryson:* And even the great wits, Mr. Fadiman, had to believe very thoroughly in something.

*Fadiman:* That's what makes them last.

# RABELAIS

## *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

HIRAM HAYDN • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Rabelais is one of those men whose names become adjectives. We say "Rabelaisian," meaning a certain kind of rough and not decorous humor. And I think, as in most cases of this sort, the adjective is rather unjust to the man. Rabelais was a good deal more than a string of dirty stories, despite his current reputation.

*Michalopoulos:* Indeed, Mr. Bryson, he was. François Rabelais gives me the impression of immensity, of vastness. He is vast like the plains of Kansas with their fertility and germination, or like the sea. And what you find with vast plains and with the sea is that you can look at them, and you can dislike them, but you can't quite criticize them.

*Haydn:* And he has another quality in common with the sea, and that is his diversity. Contrary to what Mr. Bryson quite rightly said a moment ago is the point of view of many people toward Rabelais—the feeling that he is all one flat, broad kind of humor. He is infinitely diverse, and he moves from lightness to bludgeoning, or from frivolity to seriousness at a tremendous pace.

*Michalopoulos:* There's not one moment of dullness in him. That is his outstanding quality. He's never dull.

*Bryson:* And I suppose we can understand him a little better if we put him back in his sixteenth century. He was born just before the beginning of the sixteenth century, in 1495, and he represents—I bow to you here, Mr. Haydn, as somebody who has studied the Renaissance far more than I've ever been able to do—he is a striking representative of the Renaissance in France.

*Haydn:* A very striking one.

*Bryson:* His dates are earlier than the Renaissance figures of our own English literature whom we see in the Elizabethans, but his is the wave of the same thing.

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*Haydn*: That's right. In fact, he represents the height of the wave in France, as it moved from Italy into France.

*Michalopoulos*: Wouldn't you say, Mr. Haydn, that he is really one of the fathers of the French Renaissance, just as much as the Pleiade, as Ronsard, or Joachim duBellay. He comes a little before them, in fact.

*Haydn*: And somehow or other, they stand in his shadow, too.

*Michalopoulos*: They stand in his shadow. He's a very great man.

*Bryson*: And he gives a dimension to the Renaissance, which is not always visible in the others. In spite of the gusto and what we can call the Rabelaisian quality of other Renaissance figures, he has more of this immensity, this diversity, this range and scope, than any of them, hasn't he?

*Haydn*: Yes, the famous Burckhardt term, *huomo universale*, is in a sense true of him.

*Michalopoulos*: He is the universal man.

*Haydn*: His many kinds of occupations and his many kinds of talents are extraordinary.

*Bryson*: And, like men of his time, and men of his kind, practically all his life long he worked at a book, and he kept publishing volumes of this one book.

*Michalopoulos*: One has the impression that it was his hobby, because he did so many other things besides.

*Bryson*: And the other things he did, of course, are reflected in the book, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: Indeed, they are.

*Bryson*: But what is the book? What is it about? Why read Rabelais now?

*Michalopoulos*: Because this is a great story. Above everything else it's a great story, and Rabelais is a great artist. I don't think he's out to moralize. I don't think he's out to teach anything directly, or even indirectly. He does so indirectly by the depth and breadth of his observations.

*Bryson*: Oh, but he indulges in his opinions, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: He indulges his opinions, but his primary object is to tell a story, and it's a rapid-moving story. It's a story that's direct; and one of his great qualities, I find, is his complete objectivity. He doesn't inject himself too much. He may have his opinions and voice them, but he doesn't inject his personality. He's above the book, and outside it.

*Bryson*: But if he wanted to tell a story of war and adventure, of youth and boys growing up, and of love and trouble, why did he take several giants as his heroes? Why did he take men whose size



and exploits and difficulties were all on a superhuman scale? Gargantua and Pantagruel and all the rest of them are huge figures that sort of stomp around on other men in getting their own way.

*Michalopoulos*: I think he loved what the French would call *le fantasque*. I don't quite know how you would translate that, but that is a very Gallic quality. He wanted to be extraordinary, and he tells an extraordinary story. But the story does move, you see. It moves through a lot of gyrations. It's a story that goes forward. It's a story of a travel. Eventually they get to this Holy Bottle. That may or may not be a parody on the Holy Grail, it's not irreverent here, not really. He's not irreverent.

*Bryson*: He's extremely disrespectful, however. He doesn't like the monks of his time and he doesn't like the rigorous, Calvinistic theologians of his time. But, after all, he started out as a monk.

*Michalopoulos*: I would take exception to your statement that he doesn't like the monks of his time. He doesn't like those among the monks who were ignorant.

*Bryson*: Well, he thought there were a lot of them.

*Haydn*: This is very like his attitude toward the education of his time. It isn't that he doesn't believe that there were strong humanistic currents in the education of his time, which he believes in thoroughly. One has only to read the description of the education of, first, Gargantua and then Pantagruel to know this. But he swings out pretty ferociously at the dregs of scholasticism and at the pedants of all kinds who dominate certain places of learning.

*Michalopoulos*: Absolutely! Pedantry was the vice of the Middle Ages and of scholasticism, and of the so-called educated members of the church. And it was the church that gave the chief education of the time.

*Haydn*: But observe that he was dealing with the tail end of this movement. It has lost its vitality.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, he was a reformer, but only a mild and conservative reformer.

*Bryson*: But he reflected a turn that was taking place, whether he did anything about it or not. Scholasticism was being replaced by Renaissance ideas.

*Michalopoulos*: By humanism.

*Bryson*: By humanism, if you like, and by the beginnings of what we would call a scientific attitude. This man was a practicing physician. He was one of the first who dared to dissect the human body.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, in medical school at Lyon.

*Bryson*: That was a very dangerous thing to do in those times. But why—I still want to know, if you can tell me, because I don't know the answer—why did he take giants? Is it just a love of what you

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called the French *fantasque*, the grotesque or the bizarre? Is that all there is to it?

*Haydn*: The idea has been offered—and it seems to me to have some truth in it—that this symbolizes the question of what happens when genius, or the extraordinary man moves amongst ordinary men.

*Michalopoulos*: Rabelais also did what Swift did and what Lewis Carroll did. Indeed, Lewis Carroll is quite a good parallel, because you're not quite sure when Pantagruel is or is not a giant. He's very definitely a giant in Books I and II, and then in Book III he may be, or may not.

*Bryson*: But that was one of Rabelais' own changes, as he went on writing this book. But what I was thinking of was what Mr. Haydn just said. I want to entertain that hypothesis for a moment. Isn't Rabelais, like any Renaissance figure, concerned about the unusual man, about the man of great gifts? Isn't he disturbed by the general tendency which is, in almost all times, to put down the exceptional? Is that what bothers him about his time?

*Michalopoulos*: It may be, of course. He lived in a time when there were great kings. There were in effect three great kings. There was Henry VIII, and Francis I, and Charles V; and they were always fighting and trying to get control of the world. And I think that the whole adventure of King Picrochole is a skit on Charles V.

*Bryson*: A fellow who just set out to conquer everybody, whether he had any reason for it or not.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes. And there's rather amusing dialogue there, where one of his attendants says to Picrochole, "It's all very well; you going out to do all these things, and what are you going to get in the end of it?" "Oh, in the end," he says, "we shall rest and be merry." "Well," he said, "you could do that without starting out."

*Bryson*: A remark which has been repeated by pacifists for hundreds of years since! But look, Mr. Michalopoulos, I'm not thinking of people like Francis I and Charles V, whom Rabelais actually served in his diplomatic career. I'm thinking about Pantagruel and Gargantua.

*Haydn*: It seems to me, Mr. Bryson, rather than being as concerned as you are suggesting about the extraordinary man, that Rabelais is terribly concerned about the well-rounded man. You take the incident when Grangousier, who is Gargantua's father, builds the Abbey of Telem and establishes a rule of procedure as to how one shall conduct himself there. It's as though he were saying, "All things that are fair and seemly and decent and friendly and kind and generous and well-rounded and balanced—these are the things we want to see perpetuated."

*Bryson*: And the Abbey of Telem was a sort of utopia for him, wasn't it? I mean it was a place he wanted set up so men could go to it.

*Haydn*: And it is interesting to see how much he was concerned with the courtly tradition of his time.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, absolutely!

*Haydn*: The tradition of the Renaissance gentleman.

*Michalopoulos*: Also, you see, he is more often un-Rabelaisian than Rabelaisian. There's a wonderful passage here.

*Haydn*: You'll have to define those words, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Bryson*: Yes, what is un-Rabelaisian? Decent?

*Michalopoulos*: Decent? Well, decent and gentle and liking the sweeter things of life. There's a delightful little passage about Cupid and the Muses, where Cupid is asked by his mother, Venus, why he did not set upon the Muses. And he answered that he found them "so fair, so sweet, so fine, so neat, so wise, so learned, so modest, so discreet, so courteous, so virtuous, so continually busied and employed in their harmonious speculations that, approaching near to them, he unbended his bow, shot his quiver, extinguished the torch, through mere shame and fear that he might do them some harm or prejudice."

*Bryson*: That's a very Rabelaisian passage anyway, Mr. Michalopoulos, because it's expressed with that flood of words, that spate of epithets and adjectives and verbs and redundancy that you always get.

*Michalopoulos*: The redundancy, however, is not redundant, because it serves a literary purpose. It's something that no other writer has done since and never will again. Do you remember that wonderful passage about the philosopher who wants to get away from town life? He wants to get away from the turbulence. He wants to go to the country.

*Bryson*: As they're still doing, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: I am doing it. I live up in the country, in a sort of deserted barn, and enjoy it very much.

*Bryson*: Seeking quiet?

*Michalopoulos*: Seeking quiet. And this is what the philosopher found: ". . . the barking of curs, the bawling of mastiffs, the bleating of sheep, the prating of parrots, the tattling of jackdaws, the grunting of swine, the yelping of foxes, the mewing of cats, the squeaking of weasels, the croaking of frogs, the crowing of cocks, the cackling of hens, the chattering of jays, the singing of larks, the clucking of moorfowls, the cucking of cuckoos, the bumbling of bees, the ram-mage of hawks, the screeching of owls, the howling of panthers, the curckling of quails, the nuzzing of camels, the buzzing of dromedaries, the buzzing of bears, the whimpering of fulmars, the booing of buffaloes, the cigling of locusts, the yelling of wolves, and the wailing of turtles." Have you ever heard a turtle wail?

*Bryson*: No. One of the things you left out was the honking of automobiles.

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*Haydn*: There's an interesting geographical collection of wild life in this one spot in the country. I've lived out in the country the last two months, and I've only heard a quarter of those.

*Bryson*: You've heard no wailing turtles?

*Haydn*: No wailing turtles.

*Michalopoulos*: Have you heard any nuzzing dromedaries?

*Haydn*: Nary a one!

*Bryson*: You wait. You will. (laughter) But this . . .

*Haydn*: I'd like to . . .

*Bryson*: That's also typical, isn't it—the way he says what he wants to say? That is the true Rabelaisian quality.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh yes, yes.

*Haydn*: I'd like to pick up the point you raised a moment ago, Mr. Bryson, when you asked: what is he disturbed about, and what does he stand for? There's another passage here—if we're not having too many passages, I'd like to read it—with which he ends Book II.

*Bryson*: I'm sure Rabelais is better than anything we can say, Mr. Haydn.

*Michalopoulos*: You can never read too much Rabelais. He's wonderful reading aloud, too.

*Haydn*: He says—and I think as I read this of the Shakespearean quote, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" and of what that kind of virtue is—he says: "Good night, gentlemen, and think not so much upon my faults that you forget your own. If you say to me, Master, it would seem that you were not very wise in writing to us these flimflam stories and pleasant fooleries, I answer you that you are not much wiser to spend your time in reading them. Nevertheless, if you read them to make yourselves merry, as in manner of pastime I wrote them, you and I both are far more worthy of pardon than a great rabble of squint-minded fellows dissembling in counterfeit saints, demure lookers, hypocrites, pretended zealots, tough friars, buskin monks and such other sects of men who disguise themselves like masquers to deceive the world. As for their study, it is wholly taken up in reading of Pantagrueian books, but not so much to pass the time merrily as to hurt someone or other mischievously. And if you desire to be good Pantagrueists, that is to say, to live in peace, joy, health, making yourselves always merry, never trust those men that always peep out at one hole."

*Bryson*: And that's where, of course, the serious man comes out. It pretty well sums up what he disliked. There's another aspect of this, however, Mr. Haydn, that we haven't touched on and which you can't escape in reading Rabelais, and that's his attitude toward women.

*Haydn*: Mr. Bryson, I hope you're not addressing me. After the conversation that went on a little while ago, I feel that in the presence of you two, I should say nothing about women.

*Bryson*: Well, let's say something about what Mr. Rabelais said about women, not what Andre Michalopoulos might say about them, leaving me out of it.

*Michalopoulos*: Why should we leave you out? I protest, you did say some very pertinent things before we started.

*Bryson*: I'm quite willing to repeat them. Rabelais talks a long time here about whether or not a certain one of his characters, Panurge, ought to get married, doesn't he? It's a long drawn-out argument. Panurge goes to all kinds of people, and people tell him what will happen to him that's good and bad.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, he goes to a sibyl; he goes to a dumb man; he goes to a dying man; he goes to a poet; he goes to a German, Herr Trippa, the astrologer (who tells him that his wife will deceive him); he goes to the bells (and there he can't get any answer from the bells of the church, because the bells say, "marry, marry, marry," and then they say, "don't marry, don't marry, don't marry"); and he goes to a philosopher, he goes to a doctor, and he goes to Judge Bridlegoose. The judge is sitting there at the bench, judging trials, and the way he judges is to take the docket with the documents of the trial; he puts them on the side of the bench and then he throws dice. He judges people that way, and Rabelais says it's as good a way as any other to judge a case.

*Haydn*: Which is perhaps the answer to the question about women.

*Bryson*: Maybe. But you know that Panurge wants to get married, and he goes around trying to get some wise person to tell him to do so. But everybody practically tells him the same thing: don't do it; you'll be sorry. He skillfully reinterprets what he's been told, to bring him out where he wants to be, which is to go and get married. Now, what is behind that? Is Rabelais just trying to have some innocent fun—I think it is highly innocent—or does he have a comment upon the women of the sixteenth century?

*Michalopoulos*: I think, Mr. Bryson, that he has no real purpose there; he's just having fun. But there are people who say that he is an anti-feminist and that there was a feminist movement at the time. I don't think he was anti-feminist. I do think that women in his time had a very preponderant position in the world. They had obtained that position about a couple of centuries previously, during the crusades, when all the men were going away, fighting, and the women stayed at home—the women and the priests. And the only people who could read, write, or had any sort of education in those times were the women. The women were far better educated than the men. Then they began taking a part in politics. Now, in Rabelais' time, the time of Francis I, the women really did manage affairs.

*Bryson*: That's a situation we don't ordinarily think of as existing in the sixteenth century. The historical facts there are pretty well forgotten.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Michalopoulos*: They're forgotten because in between came the seventeenth and particularly the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, when women were browbeaten again. Now they're coming up with a vengeance. But in the sixteenth century, you have Francis I's mother, who was a most remarkable woman, Louise of Savoy; you have the other, his rival's aunt, the emperor's aunt, Charles V's aunt, Marguerite of the Netherlands, who, by the way, was quite a good poetess and founded the library at Malines, which exists today. Well, Marguerite and Louise were so disgusted at the perpetual wars which were being fought by their rambunctious kinsmen, by Francis and Charles, that they got together, and they said, "We've got to stop the war." And they met at Cambrai and they organized the Peace of Cambrai, which was known as the Paix des Dames, the Peace of the Women. Women were really very, very considerable. You have, again in Rabelais' time, his great patroness, Marguerite of Navarre, the sister of Francis I.

*Bryson*: Well now, was Rabelais objecting to that, or was his long discussion of marriage there because the people of his time were interested in marriage and interested in the way women treated men?

*Haydn*: Don't you imagine that, if you had asked Rabelais that and tried to pin him down, he would reply to you, first, that women were indeed formidable and difficult and terrible creatures, that marriage was a bondage into which no man should go. And then you would press him and say, "And do you really believe that?" And he would smile and hold his hands out. I'm inclined to your point of view, that he really does not believe it.

*Michalopoulos*: I don't think he really does, and I think one must bear in mind that the hero of this activity with regard to women, who's going to get married, is not his chief hero. He's not his serious hero. Pantagruel is a serious hero.

*Haydn*: Did you ever think of the sense in which the triangle of Pantagruel and Panurge and Friar John matches the trio in Henry IV, with Panurge and Falstaff playing pretty largely the same kind of parts?

*Michalopoulos*: That's very interesting. Now, Panurge is really the naughty boy of the whole episode in question, and it's he who is wondering whether he should get married or not. And because he is the naughty boy, he is thinking that he is going to be deceived by his wife the whole time. He can't keep quiet about it. He asks anybody whether he's going to be deceived, and they all fool him.

*Haydn*: Yes. Of course, such a man always is fooled.

*Bryson*: The basic nature of Panurge is revealed in his name. He is a kind of force of nature; and forces of nature get people into trouble.

*Michalopoulos*: It comes from the Greek *panourgos*, and in Greek that means a man who does absolutely everything, who pokes his nose into other people's business and is a general busybody.

*Bryson*: Would we read Rabelais today because he's fun?

*Michalopoulos*: Fun! Certainly that! I think primarily fun.

*Bryson*: In other words, this kind of humor, this immense gusto, this wit, this exaggeration, this fantasy, is always good, even if we've lost all the historical allusions.

*Haydn*: And, interestingly enough too, Rabelais is a cleanser, a wonderful cleanser against all kinds of pretention and sham and fraud.

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# ARISTOTLE

## *Ethics*

WHITNEY J. OATES • HOUSTON PETERSON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Whether they know it or not, most people solve problems of conduct and problems of the destiny of man and the possibilities of happiness largely in Aristotelian terms. At any rate, all thinking about what is good, if it doesn't have a definitely religious turn and is not derived out of religious thought, ultimately derives out of the questions that Aristotle posed—questions that are not any nearer solution now than they were then, but are still plaguing us with the necessity to choose between good and evil for a purpose which Aristotle defined very definitely as happiness.

*Oates:* Before we talk about happiness, Mr. Bryson, I think that we ought to be well aware that Aristotle believed ethics and politics to be two aspects of a single subject. That is to say, one could not talk about man in the face of his ethical predicaments without bearing in mind that fact that man is by nature a political animal.

*Peterson:* And, therefore, Mr. Oates, he never fell into the modern contradiction in which we are always opposing the man to the state or the individual to society. I think that it's significant that, of these ten books, two of them are devoted to friendship. I don't say they're perfect treatments, but the fact that he introduced the subject at some length emphasizes the fact that an individual is born into a group, into a society, and functions as a human being in that society.

*Oates:* It is interesting that he never uses the familiar ethical illustration of the man caught on the desert island. Man is treated always in relation to his fellows. I think this is quite important because of the sort of thinking about this manifestation of Greek culture—that man could not be considered apart from his political environment or his social environment. In a sense he got his meaning from that environment and, contrary-wise, the environment, the society, the political organization, in turn gets its meaning from the individual human being.



*Bryson*: I think that raises a question, however, Mr. Oates, that is puzzling the world a great deal in the present conflict of political and ethical ideas—or ideologies, if you want to use a fashionable tag—as to whether, when we say that man is a political animal in Aristotle's sense and realizes himself in association with his fellows for common purposes, that means, as appears to be the idea in some places in the world now, that man is merely instrumental to the purposes of the state and that man is for the state.

*Oates*: Aristotle, Mr. Bryson, would emphatically deny that conclusion.

*Peterson*: I think, Mr. Oates, that's important, because there are commentators who merge Aristotle's human man with the citizen as if he had no other prerogatives, no other virtues, no other excellences. Whereas Aristotle ends with his discussion of the contemplative, the intellectual, virtues, quite freeing him from this rigid dependence on the state. He is an aristocrat, I suppose, like Plato, but I think Aristotle's thought can be carried over, don't you think so, more easily than some of the other Greeks for that reason?

*Oates*: Well, I don't know exactly what you mean by calling him an "aristocrat," Mr. Peterson.

*Peterson*: Well, I don't want to divert us from the subject of the *Ethics*, but he did feel that there were superior groups of beings. He had grave suspicion of democracy even in the Greek sense. He founded his own system on slavery and so on. In that sense he was an aristocrat, say, compared with Wilson or Jackson or Mr. Bryson.

*Oates*: Let Mr. Bryson speak on that, Mr. Peterson!

*Bryson*: Aristotle is an aristocrat perhaps. Rather, one would say he was a realist. He lived in a society that was founded on slavery. Like most good philosophers—like you two gentlemen, for instance—he tried to find a way of justifying the life around him if he could. He didn't see any way of constructing an economy without slavery; so, I think he was more a realist than he was an aristocrat. But he did believe, didn't he, that excellence was something that all men could strive for? And isn't that the basic idea of democracy, after all?

*Peterson*: That's precisely, Mr. Bryson, a way of saying that his thought is flexible and can be carried over more easily than Plato's—despite the fact that Mr. Oates is a Platonist.

*Oates*: Mr. Peterson, this leads me to reflect on what Aristotle thought was the end of man.

*Bryson*: What is this "happiness" idea, Mr. Oates? Let's get back to that, can we now?

*Oates*: One thing about Aristotle's statement with respect to happiness that strikes me as important is that he says happiness is an activity and it's an activity that has to be going on all the time.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Bryson*: It's not an escape?

*Oates*: Not an escape. No, Mr. Bryson. It's an activity. He says one swallow doesn't make a summer, you remember. Then, when he is pressed for what he means by happiness—when he is asked, how do you get it?—he says happiness is living in accordance with virtue.

*Bryson*: Well, we'll have to ask you right now, before you go on—this I can see is an exigency that will take a little time, Mr. Oates—what do you mean by virtue?

*Peterson*: May I add just one note here, Mr. Bryson, apropos of happiness? I think it is important to stress the fact that with Aristotle, as with any good psychologist, pleasure and happiness are not synonymous. Happiness is a much larger and more dynamic notion.

*Oates*: Oh, Mr. Peterson, I always like to think of happiness as pleasure in white tie and tails.

*Peterson*: No, you don't! Now, just because I'm a Rutgers man, you're speaking condescendingly, Mr. Oates.

*Bryson*: You get these New Jersey institutional rivalries out of the discussion of Aristotle and let's get back to happiness.

*Peterson*: Well, I'm trying to get back, but Mr. Oates interrupted me. I'd like to put before happiness a term that Eric Fromm, the distinguished psycho-analyst, uses of our day. He's something of an Aristotelian and he speaks again and again of *productive* happiness. I think that adjective stresses the notion of activity, that you emphasized, Mr. Oates.

*Oates*: Oh, yes, certainly, Mr. Peterson.

*Bryson*: In the practical sense, he means productive of values, doesn't he?

*Peterson*: Yes, of psychological productivity, which is an ongoing thing. All right, go ahead, Mr. Oates.

*Bryson*: Now, let's go on to virtue, Mr. Oates.

*Oates*: I got started on this exegesis when I was thwarted, I thought. The next step is to face up to the definition of virtue and his definition of virtue, which comes in the second book of the *Ethics*. This appears to me to be the core of the document. Aristotle says virtue is a state of character, habit, a disposition of a person concerned with choice, lying in a mean which is relative to us and which can be defined by reason or by that by which the man of practical wisdom would define it. Now, that, gentlemen, is one of the most concentrated short statements. I think I would like to examine these terms as they come along.

*Bryson*: That's too concentrated to mean much until one takes it apart—which, of course, is characteristic of a good deal of Aristotle's thought. Trying to box in a definition there, Mr. Oates, you said virtue was a habit, a disposition, a state of character. Does that mean

that the man of virtue is a man who does not need to consult his principles? He would act, we would almost say, habitually in the right way? To use a modern term very loosely, he would act instinctively in the right way? He wouldn't have to stop to think what is the right thing to do?

*Oates*: Aristotle says—and he makes a distinction between moral virtues and intellectual virtues—that one gets intellectual virtues by teaching, whereas, one achieves moral virtues by habit. You get to be just by acting justly, by developing the habit of doing it.

*Bryson*: But you see how important this is in modern psychology, and in modern ideas of right and wrong, Mr. Oates, because it seems to eliminate from the moral world the person who continues to have to decide whether or not he wants to be just. In other words, Aristotle says the good man is not tempted. Doesn't he?

*Oates*: Well, his final court of appeal is the reason of this man of practical wisdom. In this particular context at any event, there is nothing further beyond which you can go than the reason or the man—that final *spoudaios*, he called him—that fellow that is nice, cultivated, wise, has read a lot, is self-controlled, and so on.

*Bryson*: The ideal British gentleman of 1875?

*Peterson*: You're making him a rather dull fellow, Mr. Oates. After all, we must remember that this work of Aristotle, the *Ethics*, is a highly condensed series, probably, of lecture notes taken down by a student, and he's summarizing this doctrine of the mean. I think it's most important to stress the fact that the mean is an achievement.

*Bryson*: We haven't mentioned the doctrine of the mean up to now, Mr. Peterson.

*Oates*: Oh, yes, I mentioned it in my original definition.

*Bryson*: Incidentally, what is this doctrine of the mean?

*Peterson*: Well, it can mean just a dull mediocrity—as Horace said “golden mediocrity”—but it's the most difficult thing in the world to achieve or to make a habit of according to Aristotle. If time permitted, we would have to draw in musical analogies, the tuned string, or the athlete in high tension, or the doctor with his delicate problem of diagnosis and treatment, or, indeed, I think the tragic hero. It's so easy to dismiss this book as Lord Russell does as a dull, vulgar, bourgeois expression of mediocrity.

*Oates*: Mr. Peterson, I think perhaps this principle of the mean or the principle of moderation is one of the most misunderstood conceptions that have come out of classical antiquity.

*Bryson*: It's one of the things that's always attributed to Aristotle. Now, if it's misunderstood, what did he mean by it?

*Oates*: Well, I would like to say that most people mean by it a principle which is dull, as Mr. Peterson has already pointed out.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Bryson*: Escape?

*Peterson*: A low level of achievement rather than high.

*Oates*: Well, I am reminded of the statement about a certain politician who was said to have gone through life carefully avoiding both good and evil. That is absolutely the most flagrant distortion of the principle. All Aristotle means, it seems to me, by the principle is this: when one is faced with ethical problems, when one finds one's self in an ethical predicament, it is necessary for him to look at that situation as involving three terms instead of two. Right-wrong, or bad-good, would be the simpler way of looking at it; whereas, Aristotle says, there are three terms involved; the virtue, which is the mean, and the two opposing excesses or defects, which are the vices. The simple illustration, of course, is courage as the mean between cowardice and rashness. But the real point in Aristotle is this: that virtue for him is by way of being an extreme. Viewed qualitatively it is an extreme. I think I could illustrate this best perhaps by taking our common, everyday phrase, which we use very frequently. We say so-and-so is *too* honest. Now, in terms of Aristotle's analysis, that phrase "too honest" would be meaningless, because if you're too honest you're no longer honest, and you're something else, something different.

*Peterson*: In other words, Mr. Oates, this golden mean is no golden anemia as I used to express it. I got so tired of rather tubercular minds talking about moderation which has been thrust upon them, rather than making it an achievement. I wonder, Mr. Bryson, if this thing isn't so difficult it was for that reason Aristotle said that young people shouldn't study politics or ethics. They really can't grasp it.

*Bryson*: Why don't young people like Aristotle, Mr. Peterson?

*Peterson*: Why? Because it's easier to go to the two extremes.

*Bryson*: Of course, what you say is true, and it is the right way to interpret what Aristotle meant, but it is still true also, and it *is* a rather difficult thing for some people to grasp, that you can have what you think is a virtue in excess. That is, an excess any quality vitiates the virtue, which it would be if it were done in moderation. You can't be excessive. Let's get into a field where it's a little more tricky but also a little more applicable to the problems of today. A man can be, by Aristotle's principles, so excessively patriotic that his patriotism has ceased to be a virtue. Is that right?

*Oates*: I would certainly say so, Mr. Bryson. It is very hard for some people to see, but, so far as ethical thought is concerned, this, to my mind, is the most profound and effective insight in the whole book. It seems to me that if one does bear this mind, if one everyday, as he faces his concrete ethical problems, could remember this, he would be profited enormously by it.

*Peterson*: Mr. Oates, isn't the difficulty here that such a quality as patriotism carried to excess not only makes that virtue a vice, but throws all the other qualities or virtues out of proportion?

*Bryson*: Any excess does that, Mr. Peterson?

*Peterson*: Offhand I'd hesitate to say *any* excess.

*Bryson*: Aristotle would say it, wouldn't he?

*Peterson*: As a matter of fact, Mr. Oates has just said that some virtues are extremes.

*Oates*: No, Mr. Peterson, all virtues are by way of being extremes. That's what the mean means.

*Peterson*: Well, if we begin to put it in that way in brief time we are going to throw almost everybody into complete confusion, because we have just defined the mean as an esthetic position between extremes, so I don't like to express it in that fashion. I mentioned a moment ago the tragic poets, Mr. Oates. Would you go along with the notion that Aristotle's *Ethics* is partly a generalization from the catastrophes of the tragic heroes? That is to say, they fell into extravagances, into extremes, and in that sense destroyed themselves and those about them. Does that make sense to you?

*Oates*: Certainly it makes sense because, after all, one of the favorite bases of great tragedy is the notion of over-weening pride, which is just exactly the kind of excess against which Aristotle himself would be arguing.

*Bryson*: And also it fits Aristotle's own definition of tragedy perfectly.

*Oates*: Yes!

*Bryson*: There are two things here I should like to ask, Mr. Oates. Is practical wisdom the last word then on virtue?

*Oates*: I would like to ask back at you whether or not you are satisfied with this definition of virtue, Mr. Bryson?

*Bryson*: No, I'm not!

*Oates*: Well, why are you not?

*Bryson*: Because I think there are questions which go beyond the reach of what a practically wise, prudent man can say.

*Oates*: But, then, why did Aristotle stop in this definition of virtue by making his final court of appeal reason or the man of practical wisdom, Mr. Bryson? What's your answer to that?

*Bryson*: Well, there is a big difference, Mr. Oates, between reason and the wisdom of the ordinary, practical man. Perhaps the ordinary, practical man, by reason of his habit of life—and Aristotle himself talked a great deal about the relation between habit and character—is incapable or becomes incapable of using his reason upon certain ultimate principles which may transcend the advice and the experience of practical wisdom. Doesn't Aristotle himself—and this is the other question I wanted to ask—almost admit difficulty in this by saying that, after all, the highest form of action is contemplation and the highest form of living is contemplation?

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Oates*: All right, Mr. Bryson. Why do you suppose he put that in his book on ethics.

*Bryson*: I know what you want me to say.

*Oates*: No, I'm asking you.

*Bryson*: And I think I would agree with you, because in the long run Aristotle never could forget that he was for eighteen years or so a pupil of Plato.

*Peterson*: I think, Mr. Bryson, the answer would come in this fashion—although you don't have it word for word in the *Ethics*—that on one hand his ethics merges with the politics, and at the other end it merges with the metaphysics, and the peculiar function of a rational and speculative man is, if not the contemplation of Plato's eternal forms, the contemplation of the ultimate reality of things.

*Oates*: And where is the ultimate reality of things, according to the *Ethics*, Mr. Peterson?

*Peterson*: It's probably in the *Metaphysics*, if you will take that as a short answer.

*Bryson*: What we have got ourselves into here is, of course, what makes the *Ethics*, in the long run, unsatisfactory to a very large part of the Western mind. A very large number of people have found that ultimately practical wisdom is not a sufficient answer to some of the problems of life.

*Oates*: Well, I certainly think that Aristotle quite purposely put his plug in for the life of contemplation in this tenth book. As a matter of fact, there is a chapter in the tenth book where Aristotle is genuinely eloquent and moving when he talks about the life of the mind. The reason is the most valuable part within us, he says, and it is incumbent upon us to become—his phrase is—"as immortal as we possibly can by living according to that highest element within us."

*Peterson*: Well, to balance that high note, Mr. Oates, I would remind you . . .

*Oates*: A very high note, Mr. Peterson, a very high note.

*Peterson*: And I'm not going to let you end on that. Aristotle emphasized the fact that men need external goods and health as a basis not only for social virtue, but for, I suspect, the possibilities of contemplation.

*Bryson*: Well, isn't it true, then, that what Aristotle meant was that man should follow prudence in order to provide a life in which the pursuit of truth, some examination of things ultimate beyond the ordinary means of investigation were possible, and that that would be the higher life which a perfect politics and a perfect ethics would make open to him?

# JOHN STUART MILL

## Utilitarianism

MAX LERNER

• HOUSTON PETERSON

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* John Stuart Mill's philosophy has often been described as a kind of dry, over-logical approach to life on the one hand, and as a too indulgent attitude toward human pleasure on the other—which is curious for a man who was a great writer as well as a great thinker, and who wrote in very lucid and extremely persuasive English. How do you explain the difference between Mill's reputation and Mill as a person?

*Peterson:* I'm not going to answer that at once, Mr. Bryson, I think we have got to start out with Jeremy Bentham.

*Bryson:* Who was less well understood than Mill, Mr. Peterson.

*Peterson:* I suppose so, but one of the most fascinating of all Englishmen—a man who had no vices, I believe, but playing the piano. He dodged six or eight women during his eighty years, but he was always willing to write a constitution for Russia or for Ecuador. Bentham, as you know better than I, was a chronic reformer. He found so much unreason and brutality in the English law system. . .

*Bryson:* Of a hundred and fifty-odd years ago.

*Peterson:* Yes! I speak of the period roughly from 1780 to at least 1830. Here were hundreds of laws that provided for capital or corporal punishment, and Mr. Bentham wanted to take the brutality, the unreason, out of those laws by testing them. And what was his test? Not reason, not feeling, not intuition, but utility. How do these laws work out in practice? Let's see what they do to people and, if they don't do good things to people, let's throw them out. That's Benthamism in a word.

*Bryson:* Now, what's the relation between Benthamism and John Stuart Mill?

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Lerner:* While Mr. Peterson was talking, Mr. Bryson, it occurred to me that Bentham and his group looked around and found a hapless boy whom they were going to turn into the perfect Benthamite. That boy was the son of James Mill, namely, John Stuart Mill. He tells about it, by the way, in his autobiography—how he was brought up by this whole group in the exactly perfect way to show how the principle of utility and the right associations in the mind of a boy would produce genius. The result was, as he tells in his autobiography, that, at the age of twenty, he reached a mental crisis in his life—what we would call today a break-down. He came to the conclusion that everything that he had learned, that all the good things in life that the Benthamites had been working for, even if they could be accomplished, would make little difference to him in his life.

*Bryson:* And he was only twenty, Mr. Lerner.

*Lerner:* He was only twenty, and he came to this feeling of complete and utter desolation, an emptiness. Then he got over it, as he tells, by reading some of Wordsworth's poems and by finding out that there were more important things in life than utility, in this narrow sense, and reason; that there were irrational things in life like the beauties of nature and feelings, and poetry. I think that this experience of his explains to a very great extent why John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism is different from the utilitarianism of Bentham.

*Bryson:* In other words, Mr. Lerner, he gives utilitarianism a depth and a reach and a passion which it didn't have before and which the word doesn't seem to suggest.

*Lerner:* Depth and reach . . . yes, Mr. Bryson, but I find it a little incongruous to think of passion in connection with John Stuart Mill.

*Bryson:* At any rate, depth and reach. However, following Mr. Peterson's remarks about Bentham, in whose image they tried to recreate this brilliant boy, and certainly, he was a greatly endowed human being, Mill still was after the pursuit of happiness. That's the phrase which came to us through Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, but it gives us a sense of what Mill was talking about. The pursuit of happiness in Bentham, however, was that one man's happiness is as good as another's, and one kind of happiness is as good as another. Mill doesn't follow that.

*Peterson:* No, he doesn't, Mr. Bryson, but I think we have got to give Bentham a little credit. He was so anxious for his law reforms to save millions of people from misery that he introduced what we call a quantitative measure for pleasure, in terms merely of duration and intensity. That shows the powerful influence of Newton. Science had even more prestige then than it did now, if that's possible, and the idea was that, if you could carry over dear Mr. Newton's slide rule, then politics would become a science. Of course, that was naive. It was premature and yet we can't dismiss it too quickly without giving Bentham credit.

*Bryson:* There are states today that come very near being founded



upon that principle—that one man's happiness is exactly of the same quality as another's. But Mill didn't believe it.

*Peterson*: No! Mill, as a matter of fact, committed the great heresy that made many of the Benthamites sick by insisting on an age-old distinction between higher and lower pleasures.

*Bryson*: I think it's important to point out, isn't it, Mr. Peterson, that when Mill is talking about higher and lower pleasures he does not mean higher and lower people.

*Peterson*: Of course not!

*Bryson*: Mill was always, and, I think, in the very depths of his being, a democrat in the sense that he thought all men should pursue excellence and have excellence open to them. But he didn't believe that all kinds of excellence were the same. In the words of the old phrase which was kicked about in the early nineteenth century, he didn't agree that a push-pen game was as important as poetry.

*Lerner*: There's an interesting passage, Mr. Bryson, in the *Utilitarianism*, where he says that some day, he hopes, we'll have the kind of society where every man will be the inheritor of the whole range of creativeness, of great works of art—every man will have access to all of these, so that there will be within the reach of every man the higher as well as the lower pleasures. But I think he was realist enough to know that something like nineteen out of twenty men have very little chance of access to any of the really higher pleasures.

*Peterson*: Yes, he says, Mr. Lerner, that people can get along with unhappiness; most people do, but he hoped that they wouldn't have to. Of course, gentlemen, I think we always have to supplement *Utilitarianism*, which is a somewhat dry work, with Mill's most brilliant and colorful one, *On Liberty*. There he makes perfectly clear that he's in favor of the whole range of human individualities, as you were saying, Mr. Bryson. Let us have all kinds of raptures and pleasures and satisfactions, never, never giving us a totalitarian type of individual.

*Bryson*: Each man in his own way to his own limit.

*Peterson*: And I think Mill's *Liberty* is more essential to read right now than almost any book I know of.

*Bryson*: Well, now, Mr. Peterson, when Mill said, using our Jeffersonian phrase, that the pursuit of happiness was the purpose of society and of social organization, what is he, as a logician and philosopher, offering us as a method for locating happiness? How do we find what will make us most happy? Follow our judgment, or our instinct?

*Peterson*: I alluded to that in my opening remarks, Mr. Bryson. I think it is well to remember the philosophic background of all of Mill's, and, indeed, Bentham's thought. Mill detested what he called—what everybody called in those days—intuition. Now, that's a perfectly good word, I suppose, but Mill hated it, or at least he feared it, because it stood, he thought, for mental caprice, for indolence.

## INVITATION TO LEARNING

*Bryson:* The untrained guess!

*Peterson:* Yes! They claimed it was only an excuse for bad institutions. Anything can be described in terms of intuition. It was a favorite word of Hitler.

*Bryson:* It was also a favorite word of Burke, wasn't it? Or it was a favorite idea. It was partly a reaction against Burke's kind of conservativeness.

*Peterson:* Oh, intuition is a permanent human interest, and I dare say it can be defended. But it was the enemy, it was the methodological enemy of Mills, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson:* Well then, what's the friend? If intuition is to be rejected, what do we use?

*Peterson:* The friend is the principle of utility, which was equivalent in Bentham's mind to the test of pleasure, or happiness. That is, how does this principle or that institution work out? Does it increase the sum total of human happiness?

*Bryson:* And we get that just by reason?

*Peterson:* No! No! You don't get it by reason. You get it by the rational inspection of the results of activities, I would say.

*Lerner:* This is one point at which I object to Mill and to Bentham and to their whole group. They indulged in what I would call "strategic thinking," and, because intuition had been used by reactionaries, therefore, it was something to be avoided. I think there is too much of a tendency at the present time also for many groups, both Liberals and Conservatives, to resort to "strategic thinking." That is, because a certain idea can be used for the wrong purposes, they say it is not the right idea. It seems to me there's another test, and that's the test of truth, regardless of what the consequences of the idea are. I have a sense, as I read Mill, that he's cutting corners in this sense, that he is picking out ideas because they have certain consequences which he regards as desirable. As a matter of fact, when he finally does come to something that is other than intuition, as a test of happiness, he becomes, of course, what we call today an empiricist. That is, he goes to experience. But, since he can't go to the experience of all men (because nineteen men out of twenty seem to like the lower pleasures rather than the higher pleasures), he's crowded into a corner; and then he says, "Well, let's go to the experience of the best men, of those who have best judgment"—which, of course, gets you back, I suppose, to Aristotle, to the man of reason, the reasonable man.

*Peterson:* Indeed, Mr. Lerner, it does get you back to Aristotle. I think we often forget that Mill considered himself to be in the tradition of Socrates and Aristotle. Elsewhere he speaks of the "judicious utilitarianism of Aristotle," and I think that's not very far from the point. He thought that most men indulged in low pleasures because they had little or no education and poor economic opportunities.

*Bryson*: No chance to learn higher ones?

*Peterson*: Exactly!

*Lerner*: But in terms of honesty, I think we have to agree that in effect, what Mill is saying is, "I think that certain pleasures are best. Since I don't want to give this to you as an intuition of my own, I say that this is the practice of the best men of all history." That's what it amounts to, isn't it?

*Peterson*: Well, I will admit, Mr. Lerner, that when Mill, that solemn, austere, and very noble man—Gladstone called him the "saint of rationalism"—talks about pleasure, we get a little irritated. Curiously enough, you don't get mad when Rabelais talks about pleasure. Maybe it's partly a matter of style. I don't think we ought to hold that against our friend.

*Lerner*: Well, it was partly the way he was educated, too. Here were all these Benthamites swooping down on this helpless boy, squeezing every bit of pleasure out of him so that, when he finally got to the point where he thought that Wordsworth was pleasure, he got a feeling for the rest of his life that there's something quite lovely about this thing called pleasure, you know.

*Bryson*: And it was Wordsworth, not Rabelais, that he meant by pleasure! Rabelais and John Stuart Mill seem to be about as much of a contrast as you can get in the history of Western thought. There's another point, however, at which it seems to me Mill is not as good an Aristotelian as he might be, and that is what we would call today, I think, his individualism. A good many people now reject Mill, not for the reasons that you gentlemen have questioned him, but because they say he believes in making the individual the end rather than the group. That's a problem that we're deep in now, and he certainly is what we would call, at least superficially, Mr. Lerner, an individualist, isn't he?

*Lerner*: He certainly started as an individualist, and most everybody thinks of him as an individualist. But the fact is, as some of the chapters of the *Political Economy* which he wrote in 1848 show, that he ended as a kind of qualified socialist; and you will find some very eloquent passages in this book that we're discussing on the sense of unity that individuals have with each other, which he came pretty close to regarding as intuitive or as instinct. At any rate, it was as close to an instinct as you will find in Mill—a sense of the connection of human beings with each other, a sense of society.

*Bryson*: But I think we've gone in a century a little beyond the way that Mill defined the problem, Mr. Lerner. It seems to me there are two problems involved here. He was, as you say, a modified socialist. That's a matter of how you organize society. But the question of where the emphasis lies, in man as an end or in society as an end, is a slightly different problem.

*Lerner*: That's right!

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*Bryson:* Now, in that sense Mill was an individualist, wasn't he? He believed that society and the state exist for man.

*Lerner:* That's right!

*Bryson:* In that sense he was an individualist.

*Lerner:* In that sense he was an individualist. But I think you have to add that, as an individualist in that sense, he also thought that man could not fulfill himself except insofar as he worked for society—you have to have constructive things in your life where you actually sacrifice for others, abstain for others, and are a martyr for others, in order to give yourself any fulfillment as an individual.

*Bryson:* It's a very tricky point, Mr. Lerner. Isn't that a point upon which today we are getting some questionable doctrine from all kinds of different people? The political interpretation of that problem seems to me to be a very dangerous and treacherous ground for thought now. When you say you realize yourself best in society, many people mean then that you have no right to oppose your will or your reason against the collective will of your time. Mill wouldn't agree to that.

*Peterson:* Oh, this is as far from Mill as it could be, Mr. Bryson. Of course, he was a transition figure. At one point he stresses one phase of this, the most tragic of all human issues. The most eloquent passage in the *Utilitarianism* is that one about this firm foundation being the social feelings of mankind, and he goes on for a page or two in high eloquence about these basic . . . not intuitions but feelings. You may recall, a little book that was found in his desk when he died, I think, at Avignon, in 1873, was called *Of Social Freedom* and in this he softens and modifies the extreme doctrine of individual liberty of 1859. Now, I think you have to take those two together and see how he walked a kind of tragic tightrope on that matter.

*Bryson:* Undoubtedly, he thought of individual freedom as socially creative; that is, that it is in liberty, to take his word, that men work out their common destiny by using their differences as creative, as dynamic. Undoubtedly, he believed that.

*Lerner:* Yes, but, Mr. Bryson, I do think that we owe to him a somewhat dubious heritage; that is, the feeling of so many of our contemporaries that the only way you can realize yourself is through others—the feeling of the parent, of living through the child and forgetting about living also through and for himself. It's like everybody taking in everybody else's washing. This is emphasis entirely on the social feeling. And, if I understand contemporary psychology, some of the psychologists today are making a pretty good effort to get back again to the proposition that, while working for others is a means of fulfillment, the fulfillment is that of yourself.

*Bryson:* That's the only place where experience takes place.

*Lerner:* That's right!

*Peterson:* Well, Mr. Lerner, though I won't go with you on that "dubious heritage," I don't think we can pin that, after all, on Mill. What worried him most in the eyes of many admirers—and nowa-

days it's held against him—was what he called the tyranny of the majority. He felt that this growing thing, democracy, might grow and become so powerful that small minority groups, and even individuals, were going to be crushed not only of their power but even of their eccentricities. Now, that's not a dubious social heritage.

*Bryson*: Before Mr. Lerner picks that up, Mr. Peterson, you always have to understand with Mill something that Mr. Lerner spoke of before—that he is ultimately a perfectionist. He thinks that there's nothing in life which cannot be eliminated; so, if there is a conflict between man and society, it's not essentially tragic.

*Peterson*: Yes. As a matter of fact, that's my biggest count against Mill. His whole universe seems to be squeezed dry of any element of tragedy. He seems to feel that all the real calamities in life, poverty and disease and the social calamities—not only can those be eliminated, but even the individual calamities can be eliminated. You get a sense of perfectibility in man, which, I'm afraid, is not part of the human picture.

*Bryson*: As if the world itself were perfectible, as if the terms on which we exist can be made amenable to our desires.

*Lerner*: That's right! Now, when I talk of the dubious heritage, I'm attributing to Mill something which I suppose ought to broaden in tribute to the whole school of positivists who thought that only by collective human action could you really solve all the problems of life. You can solve some but not all.

*Peterson*: Mr. Lerner, may I go back to the explanation of this perfectibility. Mill was pre-Darwinian, wasn't he—non-biological in our sense of the word—and he actually believed human nature was indefinitely pliable. Do you know he thought he had actually an average heredity, that his education was not exceptional in the sense that anybody could have been made into such a personality? He's supposed to have had an IQ of two hundred, which is, I understand, unusual, Dr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: I should say fairly unusual!

*Lerner*: I would suggest, by the way, that we have here the clue to one of the defects of this whole philosophy, a defect which makes it rather inadequate in a tragic age of totalitarianism. This complete reliance on reason and on the perfectibility of man gave the dictators a chance, because they thought in terms of the irrationals of men, which are some of the realities of men.

*Bryson*: I think that's true, Mr. Lerner. But there is also a type of dictator who believes that, by changing social conditions rigidly and ruthlessly, you can create a type of man in any image that you like, and then permanently have a society of that image.

*Lerner*: That's what the Communist dictators think, Mr. Bryson, but I would suggest that they are able to move and exploit people for their ends because of their recognition of the irrational elements in

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man, to which the whole Benthamite school simply refused to give any adequate attention.

*Peterson:* May I add, Mr. Bryson, that the chief example of the principle of utility in John Stuart Mill is liberty, and that's rather relevant to our times.

*Bryson:* Yes! So, even though John Stuart Mill seems to be sometimes a rather over-logical and passionateless saint, he was passionate about freedom, and he believed that freedom, or, as he called it, liberty, is in democracy the creative factor.

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# ARISTOPHANES

## Comedies

JOHN MASON BROWN • CLIFTON FADIMAN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* When jokes last well for twenty-five hundred years, and stand up through translation, there must be more than one element in their immortality. They must be about things that are still worth making jokes about, and they must have been pretty pointed and well done jokes. Moreover, there must be some similarity between our time and the time of this man who still holds our attention — if Aristophanes does still hold our attention.

*Brown:* I think he holds our attention, Mr. Bryson. People read Aristophanes mainly in translation now, and with pleasure, but certainly without the pleasure with which they first heard his jokes, or saw them, in these satiric comedies, or extravaganzas, as they really were when they were produced.

*Bryson:* Is Aristophanes one of those figures in history, Mr. Brown, who seems to be sympathetic to our own time because of his being in a situation similar to ours, and reacting in a similar way to the same kind of experience? After all, he came at a time when Greece was in trouble. And we think of ourselves as being in trouble.

*Brown:* I think that's right. Before you approach these comedies, or plays, you really have to place Aristophanes not only against the theatre of his time, but against the history of his time. As I recall, he was born something like twenty years after Aeschylus had died. Sophocles was flourishing at his birth, and he managed to survive Euripides, again by twenty years. In that long span of life, he saw Athens, first, in his youth, as the mistress of the Aegean, as the undisputed mistress, really of the Mediterranean world.

*Bryson:* And of the known world!

*Brown:* Of the known world. Then what he saw was, of course, the horror of defeat. He saw the greatest naval expedition that history had known until that time set sail. That was the Sicilian expedition

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under Alcibiades. And he's rumored to have heard—he must have been there that night—the wails which started at Piraeus and swept right straight up under the walls to Athens, announcing the annihilation of that fleet. Then, of course, he lived through the Syracusan disaster. He saw Athens fall to Sparta. He saw Thebes rise and, at the end, by one of the ironies of history, he saw the Persians, who had been the reason for the building of the walls from Piraeus to Athens a hundred years before, taking over and imposing what is called the King's peace.

*Fadiman*: That might account for the fact that his comedies are not mere buffoonery, but have a mingled tone of both buffoonery and utter seriousness. Here is a man who, though he used what we now think of as conventional gags and tricks to amuse his audience, was, nevertheless, in every one of the eleven plays that have survived from his enormous repertory, attacking some serious evil, as he thought. These are very serious comedies, in the sense that the comedies of Mr. Brown's favorite modern dramatist, George Bernard Shaw, are serious.

*Bryson*: Intensely serious, Mr. Fadiman, and expressing intense and passionate opinions about current matters with an extraordinary amount of freedom. Living, as Mr. Brown says, in a time when Athens began to reach the peak of human glory, and writing until Athens was being dragged in the dirt by various enemies, and all the glory was gone—all through that he says exactly what he thinks, or seems to. That requires an explanation. What is this civilization which allows a man to oppose war when war seems to be the only salvation, the absolute key to the survival of the people?

*Fadiman*: I think the only explanation lies in the fact that the Greeks had a feeling for freedom and democracy—which we have inherited. Perhaps even more than in our own time, men were allowed to say what they pleased; and in particular a certain latitude was given to a great man, as Aristophanes was, to say what he pleased.

*Bryson*: And at certain times, perhaps.

*Fadiman*: Yes. And another thing we must remember is that the dramatists, in a much more complicated and subtle form, were merely recreating certain religious observances of the time. Comedies and tragedies were produced at the festivals of Dionysus, and in these plays were incorporated certain religious observances and traditions. Now, these observances and traditions were both serious and comic. The comic dramatist was chartered, as it were, to express himself as freely as he wished, because the spirit of Dionysus was the spirit of freedom and even of abandon; he was chartered to give way to his saturnalian good spirits, as part of the religion of the time.

*Bryson*: But isn't it necessary, Mr. Fadiman, to remember that he went way beyond what we mean by such a mild term as "good spirits"? He pointed out people in the audience, practically, and he said, "You are a so and so!" He made fun of the most respected



people. As a matter of fact, he damaged some great men rather seriously.

*Brown*: If we believe Plato.

*Bryson*: Yes. If we can believe what Plato said about his attack on Socrates.

*Brown*: Socrates said at the time of his trial, some eleven or fifteen years after the play in which Socrates was lampooned had been produced, that the most damaging evidence in Athens had been the play by Aristophanes, and that that had prejudiced the whole public, which had remembered the satire when the trial itself came about. I think Mr. Fadiman's point is that what the dramatist really enjoyed is what in this country at the present time is enjoyed only by Congressmen—and that is known as Congressional immunity.

*Bryson*: Are you talking now about a Congressman's ability to be funny, Mr. Brown, or his ability to attack people?

*Brown*: Well, I'm not talking about his intentional ability to be funny. I go back to the seriousness of comic dramatists for one moment. Mr. William Hazlitt once got off one of many superb lines when he said, "Man is the only animal who laughs, because he is the only animal who knows the difference between things as they are and things as they ought to be." And the concern of Aristophanes—and the same can be said of all great comic writers—it always that difference between what things are and what they ought to be.

*Bryson*: But freedom was not the only thing that marked him, was it, Mr. Brown? There are other things here. There is a burden of learned allusion. In this play that we are talking about particularly, *The Frogs*, a great deal of literary criticism of the dramatic poets of his day on a very high level is mixed in with bawdy, melodramatic, and farcical humor.

*Brown*: Can't you say "bawdy" with more relish? Gloriously bawdy! That's what it is—downright earthy. It's pure Minsky!

*Bryson*: It is Minsky. I quite agree. But I was trying to save your enjoyment of the bawdy for a sort of climax! What I was talking about first was the learning, the learned allusions.

*Fadiman*: How would Mr. Brown, who is a dramatic critic, account for the fact that in those days of the fifth century B.C. the audience, composed of just ordinary citizens of Athens, apparently understood all these learned and witty allusions to the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides?

*Bryson*: And they were the ordinary citizens, too.

*Fadiman*: They were. No dramatist could expect such sophistication of his audience today.

*Brown*: First of all, I think you have to remember that here were twenty or twenty-five thousand people in a huge auditorium. Here was the whole city—the freemen of the city, in any case. For a

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present-day parallel, you would have to take the Yale Bowl, or the Princeton Stadium, and have a comedy which began as the lowest of farces and suddenly turned into the most brilliant of literary discussions. Suppose it were a parody of Tennessee Williams versus Arthur Miller, with the audience really recognizing the style of each. That is the level of intelligence to which *The Frogs* rises.

*Fadiman*: By then your Harvard or Yale Bowl would have been emptied of its audience, I fear.

*Bryson*: But what I want to know is: what is the difference? Is this because the Athenian audience really was so much more learned?

*Fadiman*: Well, I think it is a fact that the Athenian audience was more learned, in the sense that it was much easier to be learned in those days than it is now. The literary corpus was small. I once figured out that, if you read everything there was to read in the fifth century B.C., you could read it in about a year—something of that sort. There weren't many "classics." Another thing we must remember is that the plays had very little competition. There were no newspapers; there were no magazines. Plays were the basic medium of communication.

*Bryson*: This was the popular way of communicating ideas; and everybody went.

*Fadiman*: And they picked up, as it were, time after time, all of these literary allusions. Many of them were used again and again and again.

*Bryson*: And quite literally, Mr. Fadiman, these same people crowded into the Yale Bowl of their time. After all, the Yale Bowl is an imitation of the Greek theatre, I suppose. These same people had listened to Euripides; they had conferred their own approval on Euripides and on Aeschylus and on Sophocles. They were the very people who had established those men; so, naturally, they knew whether or not they liked them, and why they liked them. But here you have two elements. You have enormous freedom of opinion, even to the point of naming people he doesn't like and attacking them.

*Brown*: Naming dictators, naming public figures—naming everyone.

*Fadiman*: And opposing the war policy of his country, for example, almost treasonably, we might say.

*Bryson*: We would call it treason today. And he was protected by his greatness, as you say. You also have the immense burden of learning, as it seems to us—although your explanation, Mr. Fadiman, is a convincing one. And you have two other things. You have the bawdiness that Mr. Brown thinks I don't appreciate; and you have the seriousness of purpose. Now, how does it happen that a man who had this seriousness of purpose—I don't mean that he couldn't have been bawdy by disposition; that isn't the point—mixed it with this frankness, this positively scatological way of discussing things?

*Brown*: Well, in the first place, may I again start with the bawdi-

ness? *Bawdiness*—I must say it more like Tallulah! Bawdiness with the Greeks was quite a different thing from what it is with us. I think we have a totally mistaken notion. The common notion of Greece is a huge error. We think of it as this realm of Plato, of high ideals, of Socrates and the Sophist's discussion of the tragic drama. We forget the low side of it that's on the vases and the plates, just as we are tempted to forget sometimes that the Parthenon itself was not pure white in the age of the Athenians. It was a polychrome building. The Greeks loved color.

*Bryson*: They painted all their statues.

*Brown*: Now, that color, and the color that's on the Parthenon is a part of the bawdiness here. But the bawdiness is really a lead-in to what is the intellectual discussion. Miss Edith Hamilton, in that admirable book, *The Greek Way*, explained the bawdiness by saying that the Greeks were realists about all things. They loved food; they loved drink; they loved thought; but they also knew that the human being had, in addition to a mind, a body. And they faced the body realistically and were not surprised by what the body wanted or by what the body did.

*Bryson*: But isn't that a little short of a real explanation, Mr. Brown? You can accept the body and believe the body is one of the limitations or one of the conditions of life—or one of the opportunities—but you still don't have to think it's funny. Why did they think it was funny?

*Fadiman*: What the body does has always been funny.

*Brown*: Who doesn't think it's funny?

*Bryson*: I said it is possible for people to know that we have a body. We have our Puritans, Mr. Brown; theirs has been a long tradition, and I'm no more sympathetic to it than you are—and don't look at me with that accusing eye! We have a long tradition in the Western world of people who knew that there was a body, who knew that man lived in a body.

*Brown*: If they hadn't recognized that, there wouldn't have been any Western World.

*Bryson*: That's right. But they didn't think it was funny.

*Brown*: I disagree.

*Bryson*: The Puritans thought the body was funny?

*Brown*: Oh, I don't think they did publicly.

*Bryson*: All right, but wait a minute! That's the clue. They didn't think so publicly. They concealed the fact that the body was a joke, but the Greeks didn't conceal it. Is that the difference?

*Fadiman*: I think that's fair enough.

*Brown*: But you'll admit that the average musical comedy, or the average song, or even the average play, or conversation does not hesitate to leer at the body, because there's always a laugh there.

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*Fadiman*: But the difference is between the leer and the open joke. Our leer is the expression of the repression that came in with the Puritan revolution. In Aristophanes' day a leer would have been impossible. They accepted the body for what it was: a sometimes very comic mechanism, as indeed it is. A body is something that breaks down; a body is something that is sometimes uncontrollable. The body, in a word, is something which is opposed to the soul, which is always noble. The body is simply the memento of the fact that man is weak—and weakness is a funny thing. Aristophanes and, in a later day, Rabelais and many others recognized that.

*Brown*: Well, the body is a reminder—if we may go on with our physiology this morning—that the man who is born an animal is capable of rising above it to being a god. That is the truth.

*Bryson*: That seems to me it, Mr. Brown. Aristophanes makes that exciting. And the people who read Greek with great enjoyment are always insisting that Aristophanes did it as beautifully as anybody else. He goes from those scenes of bawdy humor to choruses which are of the utmost lyric beauty. I've been told that, to a person who can really appreciate the Greek of Aristophanes' time, the contrast between the prose parts, the joking, laughing, satirical, derisive parts, and the lyrical parts is a contrast almost beyond imagination.

*Fadiman*: That kind of contrast was possible in Greek times, but is not possible in our times. The Greeks, contrary to the usual notion, were very "unclassic"; that is, they mixed their moods in a way that we would consider quite impossible. Our comedies are more or less of one piece, and our tragedies more or less of one piece. Not so in those days. As a matter of fact, much of Aristophanes, has a sad, poignant quality mixed in with his crazy slapstick buffoonery.

*Bryson*: What did he go after, Mr. Fadiman? Here's a great humorist, with all this range. What did he go after? What did he hate?

*Fadiman*: We have eleven plays out of some seventy-odd, I think, that Aristophanes may have written. Three of them, at least, attack in one way or another the war policy of the Athens of his time.

*Bryson*: In the midst of a desperate war.

*Fadiman*: He was—well, "pacifist" isn't quite the word for him. But he felt that Athens was being led to ruin by the civil warfare between itself and Sparta and the other states. So three of the plays are what we would term conservative pleas for a peace policy. In the light of history, it would seem that Aristophanes was right and the war policy wrong. Athens *did* die, as a result of these civil dissensions. In another of his plays, he attacked the passion for litigation that the average Athenian citizen had. In a couple of his plays, more particularly *Lysistrata*, he spoke of the position of women, taking what we would regard as a rather advanced feminist point of view.

*Bryson*: Which indicates he was not merely a reactionary.

*Fadiman*: In *The Plutus* he attacked the materialism of his time—

the idea that things are always to be measured in terms of the profit that can come out of them.

*Brown*: And he attacks the new school of philosophy and Socrates, on the basis that they've only brought disillusionment. The real reason that he turns on Euripides in *The Frogs*, and the reason he champions Aeschylus against Euripides, is because he believes that Euripides has been the destroyer of idols, the destroyer of faith, and has been a preacher of negation; whereas he looks back, as the times become hotter and hotter for Athens, to what were really the good old days.

*Bryson*: Does this mean, Mr. Brown, that Aristophanes is a kind of type, a great beginner of the satirical tradition, and is simply against everything that is new? Is that what it means?

*Brown*: I don't think he's against everything that is new. I think he frequently champions the old because the old was a more serene period. And, may I say in passing, I think that what Aristophanes proves himself to be is the first—and many people will lament this—dramatic critic that ever wrote. I have always tried to insist, and insisted on this program once with you, Mr. Bryson, that our dear friend Aristotle, in *The Poetics*, never wrote actual criticism. Even in Plato, you will get the feeling for it, but really a denial of it. Now, when Aristophanes gets past his slapstick, and into the judgment as to who really should have occupied the chair and had the tragic crown, that scene not only is infinitely courageous in what it assumes that an audience can recognize, but it is superb as literary criticism itself. Even such a man as George Saintsbury has saluted it as one of the finest pieces of critical writing ever done.

*Fadiman*: I don't know how much of that we in our present day can really appreciate, however, unless we know the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides almost by heart, as apparently the average Athenian did.

*Bryson*: But we can see, Mr. Fadiman, that he was not simply against things because they were new. He had his reasons, always.

*Fadiman*: That's right.

*Brown*: Mr. Bryson, I think the closest parallel to Aristophanes we have today is, again as Miss Hamilton has pointed out, probably Gilbert. Miss Hamilton makes this admirable point about the difference between what was absolutely unfettered by the standards of Victorian convention and decency in Gilbert's writing, and what is free by standards of Greek realism in Aristophanes. And she wonders what would have happened if Gilbert had written in Athens, and what would have happened if poor Aristophanes had had to face Queen Victoria saying, "We are not amused."

*Bryson*: Well, you could go even further, couldn't you, and say that Sullivan supplies the lyric choruses. The very great beauty of the music of Sullivan corresponds, to a certain extent, to the loveliness of the choruses in Aristophanes.

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*Fadiman*: Yes. It sweetens and gives the work a lyrical quality.

*Bryson*: But, on this point of his being accused of being a reactionary—he wasn't against things just because they were new. I think this is a very important point to make. But perhaps, Mr. Fadiman, as you suggested once before, he was against things that were revolutionary.

*Fadiman*: I think that's true. And I think that all comic dramatists, and indeed all sensible men, of whom comic dramatists are the paragon, are anti-revolutionary; that is, they think all revolutions carry more evil with them than good. So what we have in Aristophanes is, it is true, a kind of nostalgic feeling for the past, which was only fifty years behind him, as a matter of fact.

*Bryson*: Ah, but the change had been swift.

*Fadiman*: Very swift. A great deal of history had been concentrated within fifty years. He was against swift change, because he felt that swift change in itself was too much for people; it would be bound to bring in its train political and social evil—as indeed it did. From our point of view, looking back over a twenty-five hundred year span, Aristophanes seems to be about the most sensible man in Greece.

*Brown*: May I say just one thing? Mr. Fadiman, that was a beautiful line of yours about revolution, about all revolution being evil. But it seems to me that the whole health of the world has depended from time to time . . .

*Bryson*: On bloody revolution?

*Brown*: Well, sometimes the blood has to be spilt, so that it won't be spilt later.

*Fadiman*: It is becoming more and more questionable whether that's true.

*Bryson*: I suppose one reads a man like Aristophanes because he raises the questions which are so profound and so difficult that they can never be settled. It seems to me you gentlemen have stated one here: Is the bloody revolution ever absolutely necessary? Aristophanes thought not. I think you can say one more thing about him—that he used ridicule to correct violence, and it didn't work.

# MOLIÈRE

## Comedies

JOHN MASON BROWN • BERGEN EVANS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* One of the things that we always ask about a great classic is whether or not the author is alive, and for a playwright there is only one test of being alive. That is: is he being performed now? In Washington they are doing one of Moliere's comedies and "packing them in."

*Evans:* *The School for Wives.*

*Bryson:* And when we remember a production on Broadway of the *Would-Be Gentleman* — or the *Newly Rich*, which, I think, is a little better translation of the title — there must be something alive about Moliere that still stands up on the stage. And yet Moliere's time was sufficiently different from our own to make one wonder how the gap could be bridged.

*Brown:* Mr. Bryson, it was not only different, and remarkably different from our own. It seems to be so obviously different from the time of Aristophanes, whom we were discussing last week, that you have to establish Moliere within the frame of his period. Remember that he lived in one of the most stratified, corseted, and artificial societies, and that he was essentially a court dramatist. Unlike Aristophanes, he was not writing for a huge city and a huge public. Moliere's was a comparatively limited public. In English terms, it was more comparable to the Restoration audience than any other audience.

*Bryson:* A very self-conscious public, wasn't it? Self-consciously sophisticated and, as you say, stratified.

*Brown:* Yes! To me it seems important that, unlike the theatre of Aristophanes, the theatre of Moliere is a theatre that had gone indoors. Exactly as you get all of the artifice of Versailles, the marquetry and all the chandeliers, what you have in Moliere is the beginning of the real comedy of manners. John Palmer, that excellent English critic,

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once pointed out that all high comedy is really a game played against nature, that man is born into this world an animal, and he pretends to be a civilized man; and, once you put man indoors, dress him up with all the perukes and the panniers of such a period setting as Moliere, you have man unnaturally overcivilized, and yet you have the abiding animal in him. The conflict between the two is the beginning of the comedy.

*Evans:* Moliere's age would be a little shocked at the statement that man was basically an animal, although I'm willing to agree with you. Nonetheless, I presume Moliere's greatness lay somewhat in the fact that he saw—he may not have put it in those words—but he saw the great unnaturalness of this highly stylized, over-civilization of the court of Louis XIV.

*Bryson:* And, yet, Mr. Evans, nothing is more natural than man's attempt to be stylized. Man's attempt to be this artificial creature in the face of his inescapable animality is a fact of civilized society.

*Evans:* Men like Moliere keep it within bounds.

*Bryson:* Yes, and remind us always that, whatever we do, we're still animals with animal limitations. But, is there simply an amused irony in his attitude toward this artificiality?

*Brown:* Mr. Bryson, I believe that we'll have to go back to another source to understand Moliere. Though he was writing for indoor theatre largely, his earlier comedies were derived from one of the most joyous theatres that ever existed in the world, and that was the *Commedia dell' Arte*. He was taking the *Commedia* and really housebreaking it, putting it indors, turning it into a courtier itself. But the energy, that furious, wonderful energy of the *Comedia* somehow survived.

*Evans:* Yes! Although we always think of him as the court poet, we must always bear in mind that Moliere had his development in new country, one-night stands where the mores of the court might be known faintly, but were not a part of the common culture.

*Bryson:* That was where he learned his business!

*Evans:* And where he got his exuberance.

*Bryson:* Yes, but Moliere went far beyond the Italian *Commedia dell' Arte*, which was a kind of improvised farce, wasn't it, Mr. Brown? I mean, there was a good deal of improvisation in it? They ad libbed it.

*Brown:* There is no subject, Mr. Bryson, about which people are more learned than the *Commedia dell' Arte*, and about which people know less. It is one of the great sources . . .

*Bryson:* Well, how could you know much about something that was ad libbed and not recorded?

*Brown:* You couldn't. That's why it's been so haloed in memory and so romanticized. I agree completely that those years after



Moliere, as a young man, had had his first failure in Paris and then had to go touring to the provinces and through the provinces again and again for ten years, are the real source, not only of some of his theatrical experience, but of his attitudes.

*Evans*: The problem is to bring your energy and your observation of actual life in from the provinces and then fit in!

*Brown*: That's part of the plasma and the blood and the vitality of Moliere.

*Bryson*: Well, he had his comic purpose. He took this Italian form of what appears to have been a kind of pantomimic ad libbed comedy. But he also had the court ballet to deal with. So you get, in a play like the one that we are especially thinking about, *The Would-Be Gentleman*, a curious combination of farce and pantomime in costume and ballet and a good deal of it to us is just a waste of time.

*Evans*: Before we leave his strolling years, may I say I couldn't help thinking, as I read the plays over, how much smothered indignation, how much furious, helpless humiliation and anger and resentment he must have had for fifteen years—facing village officials, pompous little country-town, upper-class officials who patronized him and put him through all sorts of—they did in those days even worse than today—humiliations of waiting and so on. Later he had the larger stage at court itself where the same things were simply going on.

*Bryson*: Yes, and where the people were ridiculous on a slightly larger scale.

*Evans*: Probably more ribbons.

*Bryson*: And you think that he got a permanent bitterness out of that, Mr. Evans?

*Evans*: It would give me one!

*Bryson*: Did it give him one?

*Evans*: Against officialdom, against pretense, against a pompousness in little people—yes. He had it, and he did have those years in the country.

*Brown*: I would disagree to this extent. The protest, heaven knows, is there. But, Mr. Evans, it seems to me, in spite of the brilliance of his satire and the insistency of his attack upon all kinds of things, that the amount of bitterness is extraordinarily controlled or hidden, and that there is more sheer joy in it than there is anger.

*Evans*: Moliere, being a genius, had this advantage over us, that he could express his indignation, which made him joyous.

*Brown*: I can't say that all geniuses were joyous. I can't follow you on that.

*Bryson*: But he got tremendous happiness out of getting in a good

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resounding whack at somebody that he thought deserved it. He could make people wonderfully absurd. But, when he comes back and begins attacking things, he doesn't go after merely village types. His people are not village types. They're perennial in a sense.

*Evans*: But the village is a very good place to see them.

*Bryson*: That's right. But do you find the bluestocking ladies, for instance, in the village—the ladies pretending to be more intellectual than they are?

*Evans*: Yes! You have ladies who read the "*Saturday Review*"!

*Bryson*: And listen to Mr. John Mason Brown and you give lectures!

*Evans*: That's very kind!

*Brown*: If they can! That's right! Now, I go back to the question of the court and the city because the great comedies are essentially, it seems to me, court bred. What Moliere is attacking is, if you go through the targets, first of all, the literary ladies.

*Bryson*: But always for their pretense!

*Brown*: Always for pretense! You see, Moliere is what all great comic dramatists are, but he particularly, the great champion of sanity. What he's pleading for is a kind of mean, knocking down every excess of pretension or absurdity or fraudulence.

*Evans*: Of course, the *Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe* go beyond pretension, don't they?

*Bryson*: Oh, yes, he does sometimes.

*Brown*: Wouldn't you say the *Misanthrope* is intellectually on the highest level of any of them?

*Evans*: I would agree, yes!

*Brown*: In *Tartuffe*, though, you are attacking the hypocrite.

*Evans*: In those plays, and possibly in *The Miser* also, he steps a little over into what easily could have been non-comedy had not the times demanded that he make comedy of it.

*Bryson*: That's true, but what probably established him with his audiences and got him his standing with Louis the King, which he had to have in order to exist at all, was his hammering away at these obviously ridiculous people, wasn't it? That's what pleased the king?

*Brown*: What made him pleased, I think, is that Moliere, knowing the theatre as he did, really being an expert manager as well as an expert actor, was someone who was always eager for the laugh. He would reach in any possible manner for the laugh. But the incredible thing, to me, is how he could rise above what was the low laugh, and then really reach the altitudes of high comic drama!

*Evans*: Sometimes he's shielding his deeper purposes under the laugh. Knowing the laugh is what is wanted of him, he sets up a situation in which, after getting the laugh, he can hide behind it and protect himself behind it.

*Bryson*: Isn't that what the comic writer of today does, Mr. Evans? If he's good, he gets the laugh from the populous, not from Louis XIV, and hides his deeper purpose under the laugh? Isn't that what comic writers have always done? They have to please their masters, whether it's the populous, the crowd, or the king? But, having pleased them, they slip in a little idea.

*Evans*: As Moliere says, the man that seeks to please the public has not succeeded if the public is not pleased.

*Bryson*: Exactly! You've got to do that. Well, what else did he go after? He went after the ladies who pretended to be more intellectual and literary than they were. He went after foppery of all kinds, Mr. Brown, didn't he?

*Brown*: He went after really every hypocrisy. He goes after the religious hypocrite.

*Bryson*: And he got into trouble, doing it, too.

*Brown*: Oh, he had the high courage of his convictions!

*Evans*: Intellectual pretentiousness! That's another one of his targets.

*Brown*: And he went after medicine. When he reached his sick years and had had his personal experience with doctors, he was as anti-medical as was Mr. George Bernard Shaw.

*Bryson*: And most comedy writers, Mr. Brown! That's another thing you've got to explain about these comic dramatists. They all seem to have been very doubtful about doctors.

*Evans*: Of course, doctors were terribly pretentious in those days. Since they knew nothing they had to be. They had nothing else to go on. As Moliere says, their whole art consists of making faces and beyond that they had nothing. When we now realize what they didn't know, one has to admire Moliere's incredible astuteness in perceiving it.

*Brown*: Mr. Bryson, what to me is interesting, as an ardent admirer of Mr. Shaw's, is to realize how many of Moliere's targets are Shavian targets too.

*Bryson*: And were Aristophanes'.

*Brown*: Oh, they're bound to be! But there's this difference. There are many differences between Moliere and Shaw. I go back to the point of sanity. Laughter was Moliere's corrective. His pleas were for the reduction of nonsense to a standard of common sense, hence laughter. But he had no program. Mr. Shaw was a social reformer and he was trying to Fabianize the world and to Shavianize the world. He had an economic purpose.

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*Bryson*: Moliere's purpose was the more difficult one. He wanted to reform human nature.

*Evans*: That was the whole thing. It's easier to reform them than to make them sensible.

*Bryson*: That is human nature. Well, what about *The Would-Be Gentleman* as an example of Moliere's art? It's the one that has been done most often. Bobby Clark did it on Broadway four or five years ago, and I remember it with the most intense pleasure. Do you, Mr. Brown?

*Brown*: May I say it seemed to me one of the happiest classical performances that I have ever seen. Never has the spirit of Minsky come so close to the *Commedia* and never have I seen Bobby Clark funnier than he was as M. Jourdain.

*Bryson*: I reread the play at that time, and it didn't seem to me that Moliere would have been unhappy. I think he'd have been delighted.

*Brown*: He would have loved Bobby Clark!

*Evans*: I can imagine Clark was an excellent *Mamamouchi*. I didn't see the production.

*Bryson*: He was wonderful.

*Brown*: He was excellent, working up to *Mamamouchi*, too. He was, in fact, hilarious throughout.

*Bryson*: All right! Moliere takes a man who's made some money—evidently quite a lot of money—a perennial type. The man wants to be a gentleman, and he buys everything that he can buy, and everybody makes fun of him, and everybody makes a dupe of him, and you laugh, and you're very happy. Now, does that mean that Mr. Moliere was what we would call a snob?

*Evans*: The word "gentleman" has several meanings there and there is danger in assuming that he's making fun of the man for wanting to be a gentleman.

*Bryson*: Well, a gentleman in the court days was a nobleman?

*Evans*: He is making fun of a man for trying to be something which he could not be by his birth—according to the mores and the training and breeding of the time. He's making fun of a man who's attempting to go out of his depth. To that extent I think we have to sympathize with what Moliere is doing. But the modern approach to equality makes that aspect of the play, I think, a little difficult for us to view with any sympathy.

*Bryson*: That's the reason I was bringing it up, Mr. Evans. I'm thinking now of reading Moliere for his great wit and his sanity and all that he brings to us, and trying to see him through the veil of the difference of times. But it seems here as if he was a little harsh and cruel to a man who, after all, only wanted to move himself up in the social level. What about that?

*Brown*: I don't think that is the point of the play at all, Mr. Bryson, and I certainly don't think Moliere was a snob as the word is now used. No word in the English language just now, it seems to me, is heard less frequently and spoken with less conviction than the word "gentleman." It's one of America's great pretenses that there are no such things as gentlemen. There are a great many people who would like to be. I think what Moliere is making fun of is the person who is really an honest man, corrupted by his silly vanities. When this absurd man, who takes the fencing lessons, all the lessons from the philosopher, and has all these teachers, to turn him into a fop, in other words to cease being what he really is, a highly good bourgeois citizen, because he's carried away by this fanatic love of rank, title, and blue blood, and all that's silly in it, and when the lover, the young man who wants to marry his daughter, you remember, is asked by M. Jourdain if he is a gentleman, the young man makes that admirable statement in which he says he will not speak of himself as a gentleman. He is an honest man and he despises dishonesty in all people.

*Evans*: And then Mr. Jourdain says, "I can't have you for a son-in-law."

*Brown*: Well, why? You can't accuse Mr. Moliere or condemn him for not writing like Clifford Odets. He was brought up as a courtier, dependent upon the favoritism of the court.

*Evans*: I think you might condemn him on this play alone, if we did not know of the others.

*Bryson*: In spite of the speech of Eleante in which he says: "I won't pretend to be a gentleman. I'm just an honest man," meaning I won't pretend to higher social position?

*Evans*: Although Moliere shows that much awareness in that particular place, in the play as a whole he accepts enough to annoy me a little. He accepts too much the division of his own time between the gentleman and the tradesman.

*Bryson*: Right, Mr. Evans. But here is what seems to me important to straighten out in our thinking. Is it his time that you're condemning?

*Evans*: Condemnation is too strong a word, because I admire Moliere greatly. In this particular aspect of this particular play, I'm condemning Moliere for not being a little more apart from his time.

*Bryson*: Have we a right that a man go beyond his own time?

*Evans*: I don't think we have the right to demand anything of anybody, but, since some people have given us so much, why, we're comparing Moliere by the very highest standards.

*Brown*: It's by those standards that he's usually compared. What do you want to do—give him a year's subscription to the *Liberator* or to the *New Republic*?

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*Evans*: No! I don't need to buy him a set of Shakespeare because he quotes Shakespeare enough to show that he'd read it, but I find Shakespeare more congenial in these matters.

*Bryson*: He's no great democrat.

*Evans*: No, I'm not saying that he was. I'm not saying that Moliere is. But I think that Shakespeare would not have condemned a tradesman. Of course, as you say, this man is a fool and it's folly that Moliere is condemning.

*Bryson*: He doesn't condemn Eleante, the young man who wants to marry inside his own class and who says "I wouldn't pretend to be a gentleman." Moliere admires him evidently.

*Brown*: Aren't we being awfully serious and irrelevant? The point of the play is its joy and whether the joy is communicated across the footlights and to the reader. I must admit, on rereading it, certainly when I saw Mr. Bobby Clark in it, it was to me an hilariously funny comedy, and absolutely pertinent in what is everlasting as a type comment—not that we are living at the time of Louis XIV; but pretension certainly hasn't died because Louis died.

*Bryson*: Has the type died?

*Brown*: No, it hasn't died! There is the person right now who pretends to be what he isn't or who moves suddenly from one social stratification into another.

*Bryson*: Does this play still stand up in the theatre, Mr. Brown?

*Brown*: Certainly, it stands up! It's one of the oldest of all themes. Take such a thing as *The Texas Steer*, the Charlie Hoyt play. Take a thing like *The Contrast*. Take Mr. Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Take, at the present moment, Miss Judy Holliday's glorious performance in *Born Yesterday*. Granting there are differences, what you're laughing at is the person who has pushed up a peg or two into a realm of respectability or pretense.

*Evans*: Shaw's not laughing at the girl in *Pygmalion*.

*Brown*: Well, he does laugh at her.

*Evans*: It seems to me that she carries off all the honors in the party scene.

*Bryson*: She does, but that's the difference in the times.

*Bryson*: That's the point!

*Evans*: It seems to me that *Pygmalion* is the complete refutation of *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, because Shaw says here: "Simply teach them to speak correctly and you can't tell them apart; which is the matron and which is the flower girl."

*Brown*: The point is she's gone beyond her teaching.

*Evans*: But it seems to me that Moliere says you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

*Brown*: Let's come back to what is fundamental. Are you so starry-eyed that you believe there is no such thing as stratification in this great democratic country?

*Evans*: No, I don't deny the stratification. I just feel a little lack of human sympathy in Moliere, in his dealing with it.

*Bryson*: Well, I think you can feel a little lack of human sympathy in Moliere all the way through. I was reading a French critic on Moliere the other day, Mr. Evans, who said that these are Moliere's faults: he's a little dry; he's a little over-logical; a little mechanical; he's a little unsympathetic, and these are the faults of the French. Now, I wouldn't say that of the French. A Frenchman said it of them. But it's undoubtedly true of Moliere as compared with other people. I think you could find in French literature plenty of people who don't show those faults, but there isn't any question about the fact that, to a modern reader, he's a little dry, a little mechanical, a little arid all the way through.

*Evans*: If I were attempting to persuade some young person today, who had not yet read Moliere, to read Moliere, hoping to enlist his interest, I would not suggest that he begin with *The Bourgeois Gentleman*.

*Bryson*: No, I wouldn't!

*Evans*: I would suggest that he begin with perhaps *School for Wives*.

*Bryson*: And you'd also have to warn him that there's all kinds of dancing around on stage, which doesn't seem to us to have been much fun, but which Moliere had to put in.

*Evans*: You said it was fun with Bobby Clark!

*Bryson*: Well, if you see Bobby Clark do it, it's wonderful fun, but it doesn't sound as if it would be much fun.

*Brown*: That depends, Mr. Bryson, on whom the book is being read by. Most people who read plays can't visualize them in theatrical terms at all. Hence, when you come to what is obviously acting material and it is not acted, or have a pantomime that isn't done in pantomime, it is bound to read poorly. But, it seems to me that the major portion, even of this play which is not my favorite Moliere play, does in the text communicate its gaiety and its wisdom.

*Bryson*: And its wit too. There's no question about it. I'm not denying for a moment that this play, and all of Moliere, has great power to stir us and interest us and make us, I should say, a little uneasy. Because he is a satirist, he does stick his pin into pretension even yet. But I was trying to indicate that you have to warn a modern reader that this kind of writing is very much of its own time, far more than some others.

*Brown*: I'd like to say just one humble thing. Granting all the period qualities in Moliere, any man in any field whose honest pursuit is truth and whose foe is nonsense is always ahead of his time. Cer-

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tainly, he's ahead of ours. And the thing that Moliere has to say to us today, what he really says to us, is what is abidingly absurd in man, his pretensions. It does not make any difference whether it's a gentleman or no. It's anybody who pretends. That's what the play's about.

*Evans*: I'm surprised that there hasn't been any reproduction of *The Imaginary Invalid*. I would think that would suit the temper of the times now very much. The medical pretension of arrogance is a subject that's perennial and, I think, of contemporary interest. I'm surprised that some producer doesn't risk that.

*Brown*: Mightn't one reason be that the world is no longer an *imaginary* invalid?

*Bryson*: Well, that could be! But, if the world is a real invalid, that doesn't mean that pretension and hypocrisy and ridiculousness is gone out of it, does it?

*Evans*: That's probably one reason why it is a real invalid.

*Bryson*: You mean we have more than anybody else ever had?

*Evans*: No! No! No! We can't! But we have our share.

*Bryson*: We certainly have our share. I suppose the old saying that wit is one thing that lasts forever holds up in the case of Moliere. I find that there is a pleasure in the dexterity and the absolute accuracy of his shaft. When he sees something that needs to be exploded he knows exactly where to put the pen.

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# MARCUS AURELIUS

## *Meditations*

CLIFTON FADIMAN • WILLIAM LINN WESTERMANN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: The *Meditations* belong in that class of books which people use as guides to practical living—the sort of thing which you have by you in time of trouble, and which tells you how to get through life. Certainly, Marcus Aurelius had a life of sufficient trial and trouble, and he wrote this book, as I understand it, to say: “This is the way I get on with my world”—and it was a difficult world.

*Fadiman*: Yes! This is, I suppose, the first book in all literary history addressed to the author’s self.

*Bryson*: Really addressed to himself, Mr. Fadiman? You think that he didn’t expect other people to read it? It wasn’t one of these “dear diary” things which he hoped somebody would stumble on sometime?

*Fadiman*: It’s hard to say, Mr. Bryson. I don’t think that Marcus Aurelius had much of what we might call modern vanity in that direction. It is true that the work has been preserved—although Mr. Westermann probably would tell us that it hasn’t been preserved perfectly—but it seems to breathe a spirit of almost pure introspection. What is interesting about the book is not only that it is the first manual of the sort in our Western history, but that it was composed under such curious circumstances. Marcus Aurelius was the Emperor of Rome. He lived from 121 to 180 A.D. and ruled as Emperor for the last nineteen years of his life. During that period, the empire was in a situation not too dissimilar to our own today.

*Bryson*: In trouble, you mean?

*Fadiman*: In trouble . . . besieged.

*Bryson*: More than just threatened, Mr. Fadiman?

*Fadiman*: The barbarians were encroaching on five or six fronts; and Marcus Aurelius, who, of course, was not merely the head of the empire but its chief soldier, accompanied and led his army in Asia

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Minor, along the banks of the Danube, and elsewhere. And in the morning, in the dawn, before the army had gathered itself together, he would sit down and write paragraph after paragraph of these knotty, little, cramped meditations, amid the stresses and strains of army life. I think it's interesting to think of this book as being composed in such odd circumstances.

*Westermann*: Marcus Aurelius composed it, so far as we know, in the last years of his life upon the Danube, when he was fighting with the Germans. What Mr. Fadiman has just said about the dangers is very real, because, in about 167 A.D., these people had come down clear to the head of the Adriatic Sea and captured the city of Aquileia. They were a very real danger to the culture of the empire at that time.

*Bryson*: And wasn't it true, Mr. Westermann, that the culture of Rome was at its height at that time? That is, the glories of Rome were greatest then in the sense of the civilization which Marcus Aurelius was trying to defend? This is the time of the Antonines, the time that so many people have said was one of the great periods of peace and happiness and prosperity for most people. But Marcus was out there on the edge of civilization, trying to fight for it and defend it against people who would have destroyed it.

*Fadiman*: Well, if it is true, Mr. Bryson, that the Roman Empire was at the height—or, at least, at one of the heights of its glories—why do you find in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius so consistent and sober an undertone of sadness, of melancholy? He does not write like the head of a great and growing empire at all!

*Bryson*: That's quite right!

*Fadiman*: Perhaps he is trying to conserve something which he feels is beginning to slip away.

*Bryson*: Yes! Well, I'm not sure it was one of the great periods, but it's often been called that. Gibbon called it that, and so have other people.

*Westermann*: Gibbon said, in fact, that if a man could choose the time in the history of the world when he preferred to live, he would choose this exact period of the Antonines in Rome.

*Fadiman*: But Marcus Aurelius himself hardly felt that way!

*Westermann*: No! That's quite right!

*Bryson*: Well, isn't it possible, Mr. Fadiman, that these two facts do not exclude one another, and that what Marcus Aurelius was defending was as great as people say it was, but that this danger he saw, and was fighting, could touch him more, because he was the man out there on the front? The people at home were enjoying something that they didn't know was so near to dissolution. Well, here's this man, the very center and master of the world, sitting down in the early morning to write his meditations, and they're full of self-criticism, of efforts to tell himself how poor and mean a thing he

was, and how he must be yanked up to do his duty and so on. Is that because of weakness in the man?

*Fadiman*: Are you implying that there was something in the time itself made him write this way?

*Bryson*: That's what I'm trying to find out, Mr. Fadiman. What do you think?

*Westermann*: Might I interrupt to say I think it's the man in his time. This is a man who didn't want to do at all what he was doing. That is to say, he didn't like war, as we see in these *Meditations*, and he didn't like practical affairs. This might be called the case of the professor of morality who has to do things which he doesn't believe in. Perhaps Mr. Fadiman can recall the place where he asks: "What about Alexander and Caesar and Pompey? They killed tens of thousands of men and what good did it do?" He's against all killing.

*Fadiman*: Perhaps even more generally he is against worldly glory. There is in the *Meditations* a vein of other-worldliness, of asceticism, based perhaps on an historical sense that all the achievements of the powerful and the great are evanescent and have no meaning, except in the cosmos as a whole.

*Bryson*: Then what is there for man to find in this Stoicism?

*Fadiman*: Well, Marcus Aurelius has certain formulae—or perhaps the Stoics before him had the formulae which he inherited. A man must live, as he says, according to nature. That is, he must not kick against the pricks. He must, for example, accept the great fact of death as being as much a part of natural processes as being born, or as eating. He must accept the obloquy of other men and the contempt of other men, because the man who lives according to nature can not be harmed by the contempt or hatred of others. Here we have probably the sternest morality in our history.

*Bryson*: Far more demanding than the morality of the Christians that came in afterwards?

*Fadiman*: Yes, it is heroic in that one sense.

*Westermann*: I think we've got to be very sure, in presenting this man, to depict him as doing something that he has no desire to do. Now, for example, in one of the last periods evidently, when he was about fifty-seven years old, he says: "Throw away your books. Don't try to read any more. Don't look up your memorabilia" (That is, his notebooks of the extracts he has taken here and there from various others). "You haven't time for the Greeks. It isn't granted to you. You've got to be a Roman and do your duties here." That's the thing that I think we've got to understand about Marcus Aurelius.

*Bryson*: And that, Mr. Westermann, might easily account for the vein of sadness. Here's a man who was fundamentally frustrated in his own life. He couldn't be the thing he wanted to be.

*Fadiman*: He was miscast.

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*Bryson*: That's quite right, Mr. Fadiman. Nevertheless, he discharged his duties. He didn't resign his empire. He went ahead and, as a matter of fact, killed himself with overwork. He died young, and he died in the midst of privations and hardships which he could have escaped if he had taken a slightly different attitude toward his own duty. Well, duty is a primary thing in his morals, isn't it?

*Fadiman*: Yes, but that was partly because he had the particular job he had, and partly because the notion of duty is a Stoic doctrine. In that one sense perhaps, Stoicism as a doctrine was particularly apposite for the governing classes of Rome at that time. It was a good doctrine for them. It fitted in with their notion of government, wouldn't you say?

*Bryson*: Did the common people of Marcus' time, in that second century after Christ, have much of this kind of morality, Mr. Westermann?

*Westermann*: A great deal! The whole history of that era has been distorted by the writers of the time. We have very little knowledge of it, and most of that knowledge is pretty bad. The best knowledge we get is from the funeral inscriptions, of which we have thousands upon thousands from all over the empire. They show just ordinary folks who are very sad at the death of their people; their lives are very decent and moral on the whole, and all this picture of the Roman Empire as vulgar and in bad taste, is a picture of a very limited society in Rome.

*Bryson*: And described by satirists!

*Westermann*: Right! By Juvenal, for example, and the Roman satirists.

*Fadiman*: Perhaps the people who live within a civilization are never aware of its actual contour. It is only the historians and the interpreters who give us the profile of a civilization. The ordinary man who lives and buries his dead and dies, in a sense doesn't even know that he's a member of a civilization.

*Bryson*: But not necessarily the contemporaneous interpreters, Mr. Fadiman. Sometimes they, in expressing their own extreme attitudes, desires or disgusts, may give a distorted picture, too.

*Fadiman*: True.

*Bryson*: You have to take it all into account, don't you? But Stoicism on the level of Marcus Aurelius would not be within the grasp of an ordinary person anyway, would it, Mr. Westermann, at any time?

*Westermann*: No!

*Bryson*: As morals, yes; but not as a philosophy.

*Westermann*: Not as philosophy! And I don't think that Marcus Aurelius is really interested in philosophy.

*Bryson*: What is he interested in?

*Westermann*: He has learned from his teachers. He had excellent teachers, as he says in the first book, selected by Antoninus, his adoptive father. I think the man from whom he got most of his philosophy as a way of life was Sextus, who was probably the grandson of Plutarch. That's not commonly said, but, from what I gather, Sextus gave him the most for his life; and we must remember also that his teacher of rhetoric, Fronto, did a good deal for him. Perhaps Mr. Fadiman remembers in the first book, where he talks about Fronto and his various teachers?

*Fadiman*: Yes, indeed. That's the most beautiful book, I think, of the *Meditations*—the book in which he pays tribute to all the human beings who have made him what he is. He could only have been a very noble person who would have begun that way. Instead of speaking of himself, he speaks only of the people who have made him what he is.

*Bryson*: And this isn't for public consumption. This is to himself. He says: "Now, remember, these are the men who made you what you are."

*Fadiman*: I had never understood before what the Romans meant by piety, Mr. Westermann, until I reread that first chapter.

*Westermann*: Yes. That is *pietas*, the admiration for the people who deserve your admiration as people.

*Fadiman*: Let's go back to what Mr. Westermann and yourself, Mr. Bryson, were saying about Marcus Aurelius being a moralist rather than a philosopher. That does seem to me to be important. Here we have a kind of rejection of the metaphysical and cosmological speculations that had preceded him. Of course, as Mr. Westermann points out, he's well aware of them and has been taught them properly, but it's apparent that his interest lies in the narrow sphere of personal morality: how shall a man best conduct himself? In that sense he seems to be akin to the emerging Christian morality, which also stressed the duty of man rather than metaphysical and cosmological considerations.

*Bryson*: That's true, Mr. Fadiman, I'm sure, but it brings up a point about Marcus Aurelius that we can't very well overlook. After all, during his time there were riots against the Christians; there were persecutions of the Christians; and he did nothing to stop them. As a matter of fact, his attitude towards the Christians—is this right, Mr. Westermann?—was mildly disdainful? Here's a man, who, as Mr. Fadiman says, had a good many of what we would call the typical Christian virtues, the virtues the Christians strove for, and yet, toward the Christians in his time, toward these primitive Christians in the beginnings of the church, he showed dislike.

*Westermann*: No, he didn't like them. He only mentioned them in one place in the *Meditations*, and then he was speaking to himself as he wrote in the morning when he got up and was preparing for the

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day. He said to himself: "Now, don't be eager for death. The best kind of man is a man that is ready for death. But don't go into it with enthusiasm as the Christians do."

*Bryson*: There was something a little theatrical about them?

*Westermann*: Yes! He felt that they did it like an actor on the stage, and that was objectionable.

*Bryson*: Isn't that an important part of his Stoicism, that you do not make a show of your virtue, you do not become a martyr? You hide your virtue.

*Fadiman*: Oh! That's simply old Roman. It needn't be Stoic necessarily. The Roman notion of *dignitas* under all circumstances ran counter to the Christian notion of spiritual salvation.

*Bryson*: That's right!

*Fadiman*: The Christian's heart at that time was really worn on his sleeve. He was prepared to sacrifice himself for his doctrine at a moment's notice.

*Bryson*: And if he could sacrifice himself in public, that was good preaching of the doctrine?

*Fadiman*: And it was, as a matter of fact!

*Bryson*: Of course it was!

*Fadiman*: But that would run, of course, counter to the Roman notion. One of the chapters of the *Meditations*, I forget which one it is, offers, it seems to me, a very good picture of what we've come to think of as the gentleman—almost the English gentleman—a man prepared for anything, acting always quietly and in full control of himself. All of these "gentlemanly" notions are not Christian in the early sense of the word. The Christians were an emotional people. Christianity at that time was the romantic revolution of its age; whereas, in both senses of the word, Marcus Aurelius is a classic.

*Bryson*: That's right! And, of course, with regard to the old doctrine that the martyr is the seat of the church, he didn't believe in establishing new institutions. He wanted to keep intact and in all of their purity the old institutions.

*Fadiman*: Quite so.

*Bryson*: But he wasn't so much interested in institutions anyhow.

*Fadiman*: True, but now that you bring up the question of institutions, should we not mention the fact that there was one ideal institution which he *did* envisage? The whole notion that we have today of one world, an eventual world government, of people living under one law, is found, although in a fragmentary form, in Marcus Aurelius. Did he not feel that, by the mere fact that all men were rational and partook of the rationality of nature, there was already potentially a world community, Mr. Westermann?

*Westermann*: Yes, he has that idea markedly. He uses the words:

"Don't care for what people say about you unless what they say about you has some bearing upon the common good"—and that's a literal translation.

*Fadiman*: This is an advanced doctrine even for our time.

*Bryson*: He based his thought, however, upon the ethical doctrines of great age. He is always going back to Socrates and indifference to fortune, whether good or bad—the idea that evil is only evil to the man who does it, not to the man who is its victim. Those are ancient virtues which he believed in and upon which he founded his philosophy.

*Fadiman*: They seem to me to be Christian doctrines, too.

*Westermann*: Of course they are! They're Christian! They're general moral doctrines. They're the doctrines of Socrates, whom the Christians had difficulty with. The early Christians had to save Socrates from condemnation after death because he, they said, had an idea of the faith, you see, beforehand. He had a premonition of the faith, as it were. Now, might I go on to say, Mr. Bryson, that there is more of Socrates, in my judgment, in Marcus Aurelius, than of Plato—though your Stoicism, Roman stoicism, of the time had accepted a lot of Platonism into it. Perhaps you remember that place where he says: "Now, you've got to be a Roman and a man and stand up for yourself. But stand up, don't be held up." That's one thing he says, and another is: "Do not, above all, disdain other people, and don't hope for the perfect state of Plato. If you can accomplish one little good thing, let that be sufficient for you."

*Bryson*: I don't want to miss a chance to ask you, Mr. Westermann, if you think that this moralism had power today. Is this still a book to which one can turn for comfort?

*Westermann*: Oh, it has always been, curiously enough. Frederick the Great speaks of it; many people have written and spoken of Marcus Aurelius; and I've known in my life two or three people who, in very difficult circumstances, found great comfort in this man, in his attempt to meet the situation which life put him into. That's the mark of the man.

*Fadiman*: Isn't that the important thing? This is one of the few books written to solace a human being in whatever trials and tribulations he may find himself. And, if the trials and tribulations are not only personal but social, as they are today, doesn't this book have a redoubled value? Just as in his time the Roman Empire, though seemingly great and splendid, was nevertheless having its underpinning cut away by the incursions of the barbarians, so, many of us feel in our time that our own civilization is having its underpinnings cut away—or at least threatened—by other and worse barbarians, the believers in the totalitarian police state. Therefore, this book has an intensified application to ourselves. It infuses one with a heroic and quiet courage that is most useful in our time.

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*Bryson*: Of course, that's true; one can feel it. But what I wondered about as I read it, Mr. Fadiman, is whether or not those who take it as comfort realize that what Marcus said basically was: not only in evil fortune must I turn to an indifference within myself, strength within myself, but even in good fortune I must be indifferent.

*Fadiman*: Yes!

*Bryson*: Now, how many of us can rise to a point of moral grandeur that noble?

*Fadiman*: It asks too much of most men, I think.

*Westermann*: As I've been reading this over again, I think that we've got to look upon Marcus Aurelius as a man without a single greatness; no single great quality that I can see. He was not a philosopher; he was a poor general. No history of military affairs marks him as a great general. He was not a great administrator. But, curiously enough, he was a great man.

*Bryson*: A great man because of the strength of his soul, because of his mastery of his own life and fate.

*Fadiman*: Yes, and also because, of all of the classics that have come down to us, he seems to speak with the most human immediacy. This is not, as Mr. Westermann says, a philosopher talking, but a human being, obviously weak—in his very strength, rather weak. And so he speaks to us almost as we three are speaking to each other. The accent of the voice is there. And it is that immediacy of appeal, it seems to me, that has kept the book alive now for almost two millennia.

*Bryson*: And kept it alive as a book to which people can turn. I don't think many people would turn to it in good fortune. But certainly, in evil fortune, it helps.

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# CALVIN

## The Institutes of the Christian Religion

JOHN E. SMITH • CARL HERMAN VOSS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Although Calvin is one of the great figures of the Protestant Christian religion, he's not a paean of joyfulness about the glories of Christianity. But he was a great theologian, and he has had a profound effect on our thinking, particularly in the United States where Presbyterianism is very strong.

*Smith:* I think you're right, Mr. Bryson. Perhaps we'll come back later to the matter of Calvin's joy or lack of it. But you're certainly correct in saying that he wrote a book which had a profound influence on the course of Christian history. He tells us that he delivered his manuscript some time in 1535.

*Bryson:* Just about 400 years ago, Mr. Smith.

*Smith:* It seems fairly clear that one of the reasons he wrote this was to defend his fellow-believers in France, at a time when they were being persecuted. One of his main interests was to set forth the nature of the Evangelical faith.

*Voss:* But there isn't much of the Easter spirit in this book. There's a certain hopelessness in Calvin. Besides, he frowned upon the kind of pageantry which we have on Easter, and, you know, he banished Christmas and Easter as festivals in the city of Geneva.

*Bryson:* You think, Mr. Voss, that he would not have approved of the Easter parade down Fifth Avenue?

*Voss:* He would have disapproved, Mr. Bryson. There is no doubt about it. But, you know, there is this about this book—it did have a tremendous effect upon the whole world of the Reformation and had in the four centuries since then. He wrote it, you may remember, when he was about twenty-five years of age, and he brought it out at the very time when all the atomistic groups and segments of the Reformation world had to be brought together and congealed into a

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new structure. He succeeded in doing that through these four books of the *Institutes*.

*Bryson*: Now, Mr. Voss, could he defend these people, the Protestants who were being persecuted, or who he thought were being persecuted, on theological or technical grounds? They weren't being persecuted because their theology was in question, were they?

*Voss*: Well, they were being persecuted partly because they were looked upon as subversive people and because they weren't adhering to what at that time was considered to be the norm of Christian belief.

*Bryson*: They were upsetting society.

*Voss*: Exactly!

*Smith*: One of the things that Calvin wanted to make perfectly clear was that his group very definitely supported the orthodox interpretation of the faith and was not anarchic in character, that they believed in order and thought order was important, but that they felt many aspects of the Roman tradition required reinterpretation and modification. He was interested in attempting to set forth his own reinterpretation of the Christian tradition.

*Bryson*: But he did insist, didn't he, Mr. Smith, that his doctrines were not really revolutionary, and that they were not dangerous to the body politic—whatever they might be to the church.

*Smith*: Yes, I think he had a great interest in doing that. And it may be that this was because Protestants were in general being criticized for subverting order and being anarchic.

*Voss*: You see, there were so many groups that were dissident and were not yet organized, and they were all included in the kind of catch-all label "Anabaptists."

*Bryson*: They were radicals.

*Voss*: Certainly they were theologically, and in many respects they were socially. You may remember that Luther, who was even more vituperative and intolerant than Calvin could be at times, had vented on these peasants who responded to the precepts of the Reformation all of the spleen and the venom that he could. These people were really radicals.

*Bryson*: Well, what's the doctrine? Calvin said his doctrine was not outside the tradition; it was a clarification of it. And yet it *was* outside. It was part of the Reformation; that it, it was part of the great split in the Christian church. I suppose it was the most logically organized and explicit of all the Reformation theologies, wasn't it?

*Smith*: I think there's no doubt about that. Although there are a great many sections intricate in character, the whole work is divided into four books, following the order of the Apostles' Creed. Calvin discusses first God the Father as Creator; then the Son as Redeemer. The third section has to do with the Holy Spirit as Sustainer; and

the last section is on the doctrine of the church, including a very interesting section, to which we can come later, on civil government.

*Bryson*: Well now, what is new? What was new in his doctrine of the nature of the Deity?

*Voss*: Well, the Deity, as he expressed it, was one who was remote, who was detached, really, from mankind. He was trying to lay emphasis on the awesomeness of God, on the great "otherness" of God, the holy majesty. And by so doing, I'm afraid, he laid undue emphasis on the worthlessness of man. That's where I take issue with Calvin. I think that's one of the deplorable contributions that Calvin made.

*Bryson*: He had to make man worthless because God was so glorious.

*Smith*: Well, I would like to qualify that a little bit in this respect: Calvin puts a great deal of emphasis on the providence of God, the secret counsel of God, and, although I would agree with Mr. Voss in stressing the gulf between man and God, nevertheless, Calvin is anxious to show the tremendous concern which the Creator has for his creation.

*Voss*: Yes, but, Mr. Smith, at the same time there is that emphasis on this worthlessness of man, which I find deplorable. Remember the place in the first book, where Calvin is speaking of man. Here's what he says: "If we contemplate man only in respect to his natural gifts, we find in him no trace whatever of goodness." He says, "Whatever in him is a little praiseworthy comes from the grace of God." And he concludes by saying, "All our justice is injustice; our service, filth; our glory, shame. Even the best things that rise out of us are always made infect and vicious by uncleanness of the flesh and are always mingled with dirt."

*Smith*: But, Mr. Voss, wouldn't you want to take into account there the standard from which Calvin is judging? That is, as compared with the majesty of God, man's majesty and wisdom has to be taken as of little account. The thing I think we mustn't overlook here is that Calvin feels he has a scriptural tradition to interpret. That is, what conclusions he would have come to had he simply been expressing his own private views we might never know, and I don't think they'd be very important.

*Bryson*: Mr. Smith, was there anything in the historical context that made it important for Calvin, in his own opinion, to stress the glory of God rather than the glory of the chief work of God, which is man, as I understand it.

*Smith*: Yes, I think behind his whole doctrine is the idea that God is the author of all.

*Bryson*: But was that not coming out? He was not a modern man; he was not a Renaissance man; he was a man still of the medieval world. Did he feel that the scholastics, the Roman Church of the thirteenth and fourteenth and early fifteenth century had not stressed the glory of God enough?

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*Smith:* I think he did feel that they didn't stress the glory of God enough. But there is another thing to be taken into account: namely, that he wanted to qualify and criticize the whole idea of merit and works.

*Bryson:* That gets us on to the third point, the Spirit.

*Voss:* I think Mr. Smith has a point in his emphasis upon the Scriptures. Calvin thought that in the Bible there was an inward testimony of the spirit and that this was what interpreted God to man. And the Roman Church at that time had, so Calvin thought, forgotten what God meant. For that reason Calvin inveighed against the idolatry of the time; he inveighed against sculpture and paintings as media by which God could be interpreted.

*Bryson:* And he rejected the adoration of Mary, in which he thought the Middle Ages had gone too far, as idolatrous.

*Voss:* That was one thing. Yes.

*Smith:* He has a very striking section, Mr. Bryson, where he rejects idols and pictures of all kinds. In this respect, I think he's going back to the purely spiritual faith of the Old Testament. His is a constant polemic against pictures and idols of any kind.

*Bryson:* The third section of his book, on the Spirit, is, I suppose, the source of the ideas that are generally associated with Calvin's name. Here is where you get the idea of predestination that you referred to a moment ago, Mr. Voss—the idea that predestination is the wisdom of God, the judgment of God, and that men are damned or saved by God's free grace. He doesn't use the term "grace" so much, though, does he? That's Augustinian.

*Voss:* But he has the same idea.

*Bryson:* He uses a different name for the same thing.

*Voss:* Yes. But, you see, in Book II he considers Christ as the Redeemer and as the bridge between God and man—Christ as man and as God. Then in this Book III, to which we refer, he discusses the third person in the Trinity, for all three are equal within the Trinity. He speaks of the Holy Spirit working in the souls of men, and he uses the interesting figures of water and fire—figures which, in the case of water, mean that the Holy Spirit is a refresher and a cleaner, and, in the case of fire, that fire burns away vices and inflames one with the love of God. In this whole section you find that he continues with Book II in this sense. In Book III, on the Holy Spirit, there is a trace of mysticism in the Pauline emphasis on Christ within us. In that way he builds the bridge between God and man across this grand canyon which depresses me so much.

*Bryson:* But the bridge is not, Mr. Voss, a bridge in which man is given a chance to attain holiness or to acquire merit by good deeds or righteousness.

*Voss:* No, always through fate; he doesn't believe in merit or in works.

*Smith*: I think that is perfectly clear. In this respect Luther and Calvin are together. I think there's no doubt about that. They both were anxious to stress that man has no way of being just in the sight of God on the basis of his own merit.

*Bryson*: Man cannot possibly please his Creator?

*Smith*: No, he cannot. But, interestingly enough, this doesn't lead to the further conclusion that he is not to do anything. Calvin is fond of quoting Paul's passage: "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" No, heaven forbid! There is this one thing which shouldn't be overlooked here—namely, the extent to which the sanctified life follows, as a result, in gratitude from this awareness of God's free gift and God's mercy.

*Bryson*: Let me be a bit dull now, Mr. Smith. When you say, "It follows in gratitude for God's free mercy," it seems to me there's a difficulty there in Calvin's logic, because he doesn't allow that man knows whether or not he's saved. How can you be grateful for something you don't know about?

*Smith*: Now, Mr. Bryson, you've put your finger on one of the central difficulties of the Reformation tradition. That is, having swept away the objective authorities, you are driven inside, in an attempt to deal with the problem of how you can know. There's a sense in which Calvin makes this a private matter, such that no one can be absolutely certain; one has always to move in hope and faith that one is of the elect. I don't think there's any way of being absolutely certain.

*Voss*: Of course, that's not the real conflict within Calvinism. But Calvin goes on for page after page of the eighteen hundred pages of these four books and tries to worm out of this thing. I say "worm out" advisedly, because many times he finds Bible verses which he, as one who is addicted to the Scriptures, finds contradictory. He has a great trouble explaining these things away, and sometimes he has to turn to classicists to explain away some of the Scriptural things on predestination and foreordination which embarrass him very much.

*Bryson*: Because, actually, Mr. Voss, even faith doesn't guarantee salvation in Calvinism, does it?

*Voss*: Not at all.

*Bryson*: Nothing guarantees salvation.

*Voss*: Even the elect, so to speak, are undeservedly saved. Having the grace of God, they don't merit it; they receive it, but they aren't even sure of it.

*Smith*: And it's precisely at this point, I think, that Calvin emphasizes the God-given character of faith itself, lest a man think that his own faith is what makes him righteous and justified before God.

*Bryson*: The thing that puzzles me about this, historically—that is, in the history of theology—Mr. Smith, is that we always think of Calvin as going back to St. Augustine. That is, he swept away scholasticism; he swept away Thomism and so on. He's gone back to

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Augustine. Now, Augustine does believe that the human will plays a certain part. I realize that I'm getting into the thickets of theology.

*Voss*: For Augustine free will was very important. He tried to reconcile it with determinism.

*Bryson*: And yet, Calvin seems to allow no place for free will.

*Smith*: I think you're absolutely right there. I don't know if it would be possible to explain this by going into backgrounds and personalities of the two men, but there's a sense in which Augustine has a wealth of experience in the world that Calvin seems never to have had.

*Bryson*: And didn't he have more—if you can speak of two such great figures comparatively—didn't Augustine have more of the Christian charity than Calvin?

*Smith*: Oh, I think there's no doubt about that.

*Bryson*: Is there much Christianity in Calvin?

*Voss*: That's one of the things that has been so disturbing to all of us. When you compare Calvin with Augustine, you make a contrast, one might say; when you compare Calvin with his contemporaries you find that here there is a great change, a real cleavage between the two. Compare him with Zwingli, who was over in Zurich. Zwingli was a man immersed in the democratic tradition, steeped in tolerance and friendship; he was a conciliatory person. Not Calvin.

*Bryson*: Perhaps Zwingli, Mr. Voss, was the man who had made the step into the new, modern world, into the Renaissance world.

*Voss*: The fact is that Calvin was of a medieval mind, as Luther was of a medieval mind. Zwingli was not. But Luther, in turn, when you compare him with Calvin, was a warm-hearted person. He'd agree. He loved to have contentions with people, and he was bitter in his invective, but he loved humanity; he loved life; he loved people.

*Bryson*: He loved to throw ink bottles at devils.

*Voss*: Yes. That's why he's a medieval-mind person, because he believed in the very incarnate appearance of the devil.

*Bryson*: But the gusto was there, Mr. Voss, the gusto, the zeal, the love of life, of which Calvin seems to be so deprived.

*Smith*: Now that you mention it, Mr. Bryson, I cannot imagine Calvin throwing an inkwell at the devil.

*Voss*: Of course, one of the problems with Calvin was that he really had no domestic life to speak of. I mean, he married a woman in his middle age who was the widow of an Anabaptist leader who had been killed. She died shortly thereafter, and it seems that there was no regret on the part of Calvin. He just didn't know any of the joys of domesticity; there was no mellowing influence of a home life for him.

*Bryson*: His rejection of men as worthless included women.

*Voss*: I'm afraid so.

*Smith*: Well, he's a loyal follower of Paul in that respect. I was

going to ask whether you think that it would be a bit too strong to say that his legal mind betrays him at this point. I mean, the legal mind often doesn't have room for the charity of which you spoke, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: I suppose that's true. But does this legal mind also account for one of the most powerful and influential and perhaps ultimately the most beneficial things in Calvin's doctrine—his influence upon our political thinking? Isn't it true that his statutes, or his idea of the statutes, for running a church as an organization is a source out of which we derive some of our present political ideas?

*Voss*: I think, Mr. Bryson, that what you and Mr. Smith point out here are really casual and unexpected by-products of what Calvinism was at the time. He didn't realize what he was doing when he encouraged the development of democratic institutions. When he established a church government and established the rules of the Presbyterian congregational form of government, he didn't know that he was thereby propelling democratic institutions to their present status. He would have said, "I, in terms of the modern world, I don't agree; I would want to turn back." He would say, "I think I'm going back to the core of Christianity." And in reality what he did in his emphasis, particularly in Book IV, on the Church and the communion of saints, was to bring out the capacities in man, not only for equality of opportunity and man's essential dignity, but also for working together to throw off tyranny—although here there are complications again with the legal mind at work.

*Smith*: I would agree with most of what you say, Mr. Voss. I think that the section on civil government and the discussion of the church are among the most important parts of Calvin's *Institutes*. One might put it this way—he opened up some doors, but he didn't know what would come through. I don't think he was aware of the cornerstones he was laying.

*Bryson*: We can still be grateful for his doing it, in spite of that, can't we? Because we can't expect a man who was of a medieval mind and trying to establish a very rigid form of theological domination to have known that he was leading men toward democracy.

*Smith*: I think you're right, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: But isn't the rigidity, isn't the fanaticism—pardon my use of so unfriendly a word—isn't his treatment of some of the people he disagreed with (which was pretty severe, leading to serious persecution in one case) the result of what was in the man? Or was it in his doctrine, or both?

*Voss*: I think it was in the man as well as in his whole idea. When he led Servetus to the stake, when he hounded Castalion, who died at a very young age, he was really bearing out part of this belief in the worthlessness of man. Had he had a belief that man has individuality and that the individual is worth preserving and that there's a dignity there, I doubt whether Calvin would have been as intoler-

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ant as he was. That's the supreme irony. At the beginning of the *Institutes* he writes a letter to Francis I, asking for toleration; and the minute he gets into power in Geneva, he becomes intolerant—so intolerant that, you may remember, Balzac compared him to Robespierre and said that if Calvin had had a wide area of influence, he would have been even more cruel than Robespierre was.

*Bryson*: I think that's the most human thing about him, Mr. Voss—that he pled for tolerance when intolerance was disturbing his followers, but as soon as he got in power he discarded it. Don't we all?

*Voss*: I'm afraid so.

*Bryson*: Perhaps that confirms his own judgment about man—his own behaviour.

*Smith*: Calvin seems to have had a rather curious attitude toward governmental forms. He follows Augustine in saying that man is a stranger and a pilgrim in the world; he's moving through it; he must not be seduced by it, because he's a citizen of a celestial city. But I think he was interested in governmental forms to this extent, that he took the two extremes of tyranny and anarchy and tried to find a way beyond and between these two. So he says, I think, in one place himself, "Aristocracy with democracy is the best form." I think what he meant by aristocracy there was an aristocracy of talent and certainly not of birth or of wealth.

*Bryson*: An elite that was open to candidates.

*Smith*: I think so.

*Bryson*: But isn't it necessary to say a word about the Presbyterian church now? After all, there are a good many million people who are Presbyterians and, at least in form, are Calvinists. Do the Presbyterians of today follow this doctrine in its strictness?

*Smith*: Well, Mr. Bryson, the Southern, or more conservative Church tends to do just that, whereas the Northern Church has qualified some of the harshness in Calvin. The Northern Church has felt that the Biblical emphasis upon the mercy and love of God is at some odds with Calvin's extreme concern for the sovereignty and justice of God. In this respect, while Calvin's spirit still lives, nevertheless there are sharp qualifications in the position that's set forth here.

*Voss*: In addition to that, one must remember that Calvinism goes beyond really just the Presbyterian churches of the north and south in America; it goes on into other Protestant denominations. His influence today is to be seen in many ways, one of which is the fact that even today there is criticism within the church of the church itself, not just from without. For when people criticize from without, they don't have anything to substitute. Sometimes it's much less than the ideal. But Calvinism in its more dynamic form brings out again this tension between the real and the ideal, between the church and the world, the world as it is and as it should be. And herein, I think, is



a very real contribution on the part of Calvinism, even to this very hour.

*Smith:* Mr. Bryson, I think Mr. Voss has brought in something very important there, that the prophet, the reformer, is always powerful to the extent to which he stands inside and hopes to cleanse from within, rather than standing outside with a long pole with a brush on the end, attempting to clean up from afar.

*Bryson:* And I suppose we ought to say that a man of so powerful a mind, struggling with the very deepest problems of human destiny that man has ever faced, is doing a great thing for us when he makes clear what the problem is.

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# VIRGIL

## The Aeneid

PALMER BOVIE • ROLPHE HUMPHRIES • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Virgil suffers like most authors who wrote in great languages of the ancient world. They seem to be more textbook than anything else. I can remember reading Virgil as a schoolboy in the little bits that kept me from ever seeing or dreaming that this was a great book. I don't know that it's possible, educationally, to rescue a book like this, but perhaps Mr. Humphries' translation does as much as anything could. Certainly it is much better than the translations I used to make when I was in secondary school, Mr. Humphries. But, if you take the book as a whole, it still has appeal; it still has greatness. And we can get much of that from Mr. Humphries' translation because we can read the whole continuity of the story. What is the story?

*Humphries:* The story is about what happened to Aeneas of Troy, and it begins with his being shipwrecked in North Africa, near Carthage.

*Bryson:* He's running away from Troy after the Greeks had taken the city.

*Bovie:* He's trying to see what he can do now that he's escaped destruction at Troy. His fate has driven him to the shores of North Africa and, as it will turn out, into the arms of Dido.

*Bryson:* Fate in the person of Juno, who hated him, Mr. Bovie?

*Bovie:* Yes, and of Venus, who looked after him; there is a conflict there. He meets Dido in Carthage and she's very much taken with him. She asks him to tell his story; so, in the second book, he tells the story of what happened at Troy, of the death of Priam and the conquest by the Greeks, of the Trojan Horse and the familiar elements of that episode, and then, of how he made his escape. In the third book he tells the story of his wanderings all over the Mediterranean world and of the death of his father. The story is completed in the fourth book and Aeneas is apparently going to stay on with

Dido indefinitely. They fall in love; but, at that point, fate knocks again on Aeneas' door, so to speak, and he decides that he must leave. Because his mission drives him forward, he abandons Dido.

*Bryson*: Let's get quite clear just what this fate is. What is it that is driving Aeneas?

*Humphries*: It's the feeling that he has something further to do. He has to establish the new city in place of the old one. He's called by the gods. He differs from the Homeric heroes a little bit in being a man with a real vocation.

*Bryson*: He has a purpose, Mr. Humphries?

*Humphries*: He has a purpose.

*Bryson*: Don't the Homeric heroes have purposes?

*Humphries*: They have immediate purposes. They don't have ultimate purposes.

*Bryson*: But there's no sense of destiny?

*Humphries*: There's no sense of owing anything beyond what a man owes to honor and to keep on living. There's no sense of a national destiny in the Homeric heroes.

*Bryson*: Maybe that's one of the great differences between Virgil and Homer, who, of course, was Virgil's model. The sense of a national being, of the nation as something that can be served as a nation, is to be found in Virgil but not in Homer.

*Humphries*: It's in Virgil; not in Homer. It's also in Virgil that a nation must be founded, and even that concept doesn't appear in Homer.

*Bryson*: And that drives Aeneas forward.

*Bovie*: Yes, that is what Aeneas is trying to do—to found Rome.

*Bryson*: But, isn't there, Mr. Bovie, a remnant of this other attitude in what keeps him from founding Rome, what shipwrecks him, what makes him fall in love with Dido and get tangled up there and hesitate to go on to Italy where he has to do his business. Isn't that almost casting back to the older idea of fate, because it's Juno who gets him into these things. It's the hatred that one of the goddesses has for him because he's a Trojan.

*Bovie*: That's so, and it's not so easy to stick to a fate that you have to keep finding out about. I mean, fate is what you don't quite know is going to happen, but you're determined to explore. That's what Aeneas continues to search for, and he has a series of revelations. In the sixth book he meets his father in the underworld, who tells him that it is his destiny to be a Roman.

*Bryson*: Before you get to his father and his famous descent to Avernus, you've got one of the first great jiltings in the world's literature. A good many people remember Aeneas largely because he was so. . . .

*Bovie*: Mean to Dido!

*Bryson*: He walks out on the girl!

*Bovie*: Well, he was more loved than loving, really. Aeneas didn't

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really make a marriage pact with Dido. He was willing to match his fortunes with hers as far as they went, but fate interfered and drew him back to a superior mission.

*Bryson*: So, Dido is left on her funeral pyre, a kind of symbol of unrequited love.

*Bovie*: Yes! She's consumed by her passion, a passion which Aeneas has to reject, and he doesn't like to reject it either. But he must, and he does.

*Bryson*: Like most gentlemen with a certain amount of what is almost stuffiness, he says: You're a nice girl, but I have to go on and do my work in the world.

*Bovie*: He has that much integrity, yes.

*Humphries*: There's also in the Dido episode some reference to Virgil's own time. If this were a modern novel, probably Virgil would have to say all these people are purely imaginary and no reference is intended to any living person. But I think some of the Romans would have suspected this Dido girl was a little bit like Cleopatra, and Aeneas was being a little bit like Julius Caesar at one point and a little bit like Augustus Caesar at another.

*Bovie*: Yes, and the fate of the rival empire Egypt was a little like Carthage, that Rome had to pay considerable cost to remove.

*Bryson*: Well, Aeneas gets himself out of that entanglement, Mr. Bovie. He goes on and visits his father in the underworld and gets a little more clear in mind what he has to do.

*Bovie*: Then he lands in Italy at last, which is the land he's been told he's looking for, and he encounters the local king, Latinus, in the seventh book. Aeneas tries to make a pact with him so that he won't just simply invade Italy ruthlessly and take it over. He's willing to compromise, as it were. (Nice tactics for an invader to use!) And Latinus says, "Fine!" and he will give Aeneas his daughter in marriage. Unfortunately, there's another man in the case, Turnus, who is the local, native hero, very much in love with Lavinia. Turnus will not put up with this and, therefore, he begins a heroic resistance which lasts from there on to the end of the book. The last half is more like the *Iliad*, where the battle is joined. The first portions are more like the *Odyssey*.

*Bryson*: Isn't it important, Mr. Bovie, and isn't it perfectly clear in Mr. Humphries' translation, that what Virgil is trying to do here is something which wasn't completely unknown in these long epic poems, but which was in a sense quite new in the clearness and directness of his purpose? He is writing a piece of propaganda. He's trying to please the Emperor Augustus by making it appear that Rome was founded by Troy.

*Bovie*: He's establishing a continuity in history.

*Bryson*: Proving that it was the Trojans who came over. Now, how much history is there in that?

*Humphries*: Well, there's a considerable legend. I mean, Virgil is

drawing on very familiar legends here, that there was a cosmopolitan interplay of Greek and Trojan, eastern and western, were all mixed up.

*Bryson*: But there isn't any reason for thinking, is there, actually, that this was anything more than an attempt on the part of Augustus' favorite poet to write a history of the beginning of Rome that would give Rome a feeling of historical respectability. This is the year 19 BC. This is the time when Rome had conquered Greece, but was perhaps still feeling a little bit inferior to Greece culturally.

*Humphries*: Yes, indeed!

*Bryson*: And Romans still were sending their boys to Athens to be educated, and still expected every educated man to speak Greek and to write it. For hundreds of years after this, the Romans wrote a good many of their great books in Greek.

*Humphries*: Horace says, "We took them captives and then they became our teachers," and Virgil tries to show that the Romans did what the Greeks could never do, namely, organize political power for peace. That's his propaganda.

*Bryson*: So he took the Trojans, who were the Greeks' great enemies and made those the founders of his own race.

*Humphries*: That's a revenge on Greece, yes, and the ironic thing is—and history is always ironic and the whole poem is shot through with dramatic irony—that Aeneas gets help from Evander, a Greek man in the town on the site of ancient Rome. He has to get his help to win this war from the Greeks and so it is truly historical in having this irony. But aren't we tossing this term "propaganda" around a little bit loosely?

*Bryson*: I helped put it in, Mr. Humphries. Do you object to it?

*Humphries*: Well, if you get it out of its present connotation, it's all right. What Virgil thought of as propaganda was simply things that ought to be propagated. He didn't mean a lot of lies, and he didn't even mean making his own side out so much better than anybody else.

*Bryson*: But that's characteristic of it, isn't it?

*Humphries*: Our sympathies are drawn to Turnus and to Dido and to Menzentius and people in the opposition. Their resistance is justified.

*Bryson*: But isn't that part of something else? I think you said at one time, Mr. Humphries, that Virgil wrote a much better poem than his propaganda purpose justified because he was a great poet. He was too complicated and too sympathetic a mind to make his hero, Aeneas, all good, and his villains all bad. That wouldn't have made a good enough poem. Isn't that right?

*Humphries*: Well, it made a good enough poem for an awful lot of people. The trouble with Virgil was that he was a better human being than he was a Roman.

*Bryson*: And a better poet perhaps than he was a Roman. Well, what is it that made this a good poem? If you tried to imagine a

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situation that would create a piece of stuffy, arid dryness, one like this would be perfect. This is the best thing you could produce as a situation to make a bad poem. A man is patronized by a great emperor and he says, "Go to, now, let's write a poem which will prove that we, the Romans, are the great people, and our roots go back to the ancient enemies of the Greeks. They were better than the Greeks, and we are better than the Greeks!" How does it turn out to be one of the world's most interesting and exciting poems, provided it's read as a poem and not as a text-book in Latin?

*Humphries*: Well, there's a variety of descriptions of nature and action and human emotions and psychology. I think that's one reason why we in the twentieth century are so drawn to this book, because of the psychology of Dido and of Amata and Turnus and Aeneas himself casting over all the possibilities and trying to decide on action.

*Bowie*: There's a wonderful place, where there are almost Freudian questions, where Nisus says to the gods, "Put this eagerness out of our minds! Or does each man's desire become his god?"

*Humphries*: Yes! That is perception of human personality and character.

*Bryson*: Well, what's the quality of the thing? What were you looking for, Mr. Humphries, when you translated it? What did you try to put into English?

*Humphries*: The feeling of the whole poem and the music of the poem, the order and organization of the poem, which is not discussed nearly enough. It's overlooked the way we read the poem in American schools, in little snippets. You don't get the sense of how the sixth book balances the twelfth and the fifth the eleventh and so on. You don't get any of that. Then, there's the great variety. There's the humor, as well as the pathos. This business of Virgil always being some kind of tearful, weeping creature of the nineteenth century is all wrong for my money.

*Bryson*: That's just nineteenth century sentimentalism perhaps?

*Humphries*: Well, here, for instance. I love these funeral games in the fifth book. It's after the Dido business, and the men have shaken all this woman stuff out of their minds. They're just out for a lot of horseplay. They're celebrating the funeral games for Anchises in Sicily, and they have several events, taken from Homer, and yet not like Homer's at all. Here's a foot race, for example. I must say, in translating it, I owe a little bit to Clem McCarthy.

. . . They take their places,  
And when the signal is given, away they go,  
Like rain from storm-cloud, bodies leaning forward,  
Eyes on the goal. And for the lead it's Nisus,  
Swifter than winds or lightning; running second,  
A good way back, comes Salius; and the third one,  
Third at some distance, is Euryalus,  
Helymus next; right on his heels Dioces.

There's a little crowding there, the course too narrow,  
 Diores, full of run, is in a pocket,  
 He can't get through. The race is almost over,  
 Their breath comes hard, they are almost at the finish,—  
 There's a pool of blood on the ground,

where the slain bullocks  
 Fell in the sacrifice, a slippery puddle  
 Red on green ground, and Nisus does not see it,  
 Nisus, still leading, thinking himself the winner,  
 Is out of luck, his feet slide out from under,  
 He wobbles, totters, recovers himself a little,  
 Slips and goes forward, in a beautiful header  
 Through blood and mud. But he keeps his wits about him,  
 Does not forget his friend Euryalus; rising,  
 And sort of accidentally on purpose,  
 Gets in the way of Salius and spills him,  
 A cartwheel, head over heels on the flying sand.  
 Euryalus flashes past, an easy winner  
 Thanks to his friend's assistance, and they cheer him;  
 Helymus second; in third place, Diores.

Immediately there's a loud howl of protest,  
 Salius shrieking in the elders' faces  
 With cries of *Foul!* and *Outrage!* "I was robbed,  
 Give me first prize!" But all the popular favor  
 Sides with Euryalus, who is young, and weeping,  
 And better-looking; and Diores backs him,  
 Loudly, of course, since who would get the helmet  
 If Salius was first? Aeneas ends it:—

"The race will stand as run; you get your prizes  
 As first proposed; no one will change the order;  
 But one thing I can do, and will do,—offer  
 A consolation to our innocent friend."

With this, he gives a lion-skin to Salius,  
 Heavy with shaggy hair, and the claws gilded.  
 Nisus is heard from:—"If you're giving prizes  
 For falling down, what's good enough for Nisus?  
 I would have won it surely, only Fortune  
 Gave me the same bad deal she handed Salius!"  
 And with the words he made a sudden gesture  
 Showing his muddy face. Aeneas, laughing,  
 Ordered another prize, a shield for him,  
 The work of Didymaon, stolen by Greeks,  
 From Neptune's temple sometime, but recovered,  
 A worthy prize for a distinguished hero.

*Bryson:* And, of course, that shows, doesn't it, Mr. Humphries, how human, how humorous, how malicious Virgil was, and it's in the Latin as well as in your English.

*Humphries:* It is in the Latin.

*Bryson:* You didn't just modernize Mr. Virgil?

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*Humphries*: Well, I touched him up a little bit, as I say. But it is really there, and this business of Virgil being a kind of womanish character seems to me all wrong. I think he loved this rowdy stuff.

*Bowie*: Also you might say this race shows the forward motion of the narrative. It goes forward irresistibly from book to book.

*Humphries*: Swiftly moving forward with the energy and spirit of the young.

*Bryson*: Well, what about that other tradition about Virgil, which is so pervasive through all of the literature of the Middle Ages, that Virgil was a kind of Christian before his time—that he was a wizard? After all, Dante takes him as his mentor, to lead him by the hand through all the ranges of hell.

*Humphries*: Medieval tradition has it that no pagan really should have known this much, and that Virgil, in his fourth Eclogue, prophesied the birth of the Child that was going to alter and improve human life and introduce a golden age. In the *Aeneid* he talks of Jupiter as the king of the gods who disposes and is provident over human affairs, and this monotheism is, of course, an anticipation of the Christian tradition.

*Bryson*: That's the Middle Ages' interpretation?

*Humphries*: Yes, that's one thing. Another thing is that Virgil isn't very chivalric, really. He doesn't think that woman's place is anywhere but in the home. This didn't go very well in the Middle Ages, so they made fun of Virgil and had legends about how they would trap this magician, how some of the women that he loved would trap him, and they made sport of his powers.

*Bryson*: Is there any reason for that tradition? Or is it just one of those accidental things?

*Humphries*: Well, Virgil plays with magic, and he knows just how to use it. He knows its powers are highly over-rated, and yet there's a point when this communication between man and nature becomes very important, namely, in the "Golden Bough." In Latin, that's a little like Virgil's name and you can fool around with that a bit. Moreover, his mother's name was Margia, and that might be magical, and so forth. But it's all pseudo, of course.

*Bryson*: Well, it's all Middle Age. It seems very strange to us, quite as much as this other mistaken idea of Virgil, that he's full of the tears of things, instead of being full of human passion of all kinds and human nature of all kinds. What you have to do, I suppose, is to dig down through the mistakes that have grown up about Virgil in two thousand years and get back to the man himself. When you do get to him, you find a strangely modern tone in his humanity, a strangely appropriate tone. He's somebody of our time, almost. Why?

*Humphries*: Men of his time were like the men of our time. The economic problems of his time were very much like ours. We'd be certainly much more at home, I think, with Virgil's audience than with people in the Middle Ages.

*Bryson*: The Middle Ages are stranger to us?



*Humphries*: They're stranger. They're farther away from us, really, than people farther away in time.

*Bryson*: Of course, there are the ideals of Virgil—of a secular blessing, a way of making the earth a happier place, of getting peace by empire, of determining an orderly world and so on—which the Middle Ages completely repudiated. Heaven was their home. They didn't care what the world was like. But Virgil did care what the world was like. What about that element in him? Does he make that convincing in modern terms, this dream of world peace? You see, the thing that bothers me about Virgil on this point, Mr. Humphries, is this—and even your brilliant translation doesn't completely answer me—I never can make up my mind whether or not he believes in all the apparatus of supernaturalism, the intervention of Venus, and the hateful intervention of Juno. Did he mean all that? Did he believe it?

*Humphries*: That's an awfully hard question to answer, because you can believe on so many different levels of the mind. I think what he really believed in was the race and the nation, and the father and son. Some of the other apparatus is conventional. I think he believed in the Divine power. I think he believed, perhaps, even more monotheistically than we think.

*Bowie*: Yes! His whole universe, just like his world, was alive. He was sensitive to everything in it, and that would make it easy to say that he's sort of animistic. Actually, he reduces that to poetic and concrete terms.

*Bryson*: Yes, but what about Venus helping him and Juno injuring him?

*Bowie*: That's easy. Venus is creative and Juno is not. Juno domesticates, and Virgil is a creative artist. He wants to release this energy, this great civilized energy that he feels Augustus has brought.

*Bryson*: Then, these goddesses are merely personified interests and powers?

*Bowie*: They're characters, all right, but they personify human powers, too.

*Humphries*: Venus is the same as in Lucretius?

*Bowie*: Yes, indeed! She's the mother of the sons of Aeneas, just what Lucretius calls her. Lucretius lived fifty or sixty years earlier than Virgil, but would never be mistaken for a magician or an animist exactly.

*Bryson*: Then, what you have in Virgil is a man, who with great constructive power, great power of running narrative, great power of brilliant and beautiful verse, takes the myths of his time and uses them as a kind of half-serious apparatus for illustrating the forces of his time. Basically he was trying to show that a great nation has a great moral place in history, that its greatness can be founded upon a moral purpose. Here, for the first time, is a man writing an epic from the single artistic capacity of his own powers, and making nationality and universal peace an ideal.



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# *Invitation To Learning*

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*Edited by* GEORGE CROTHERS

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# The Nibelungenlied

WALTER COHEN • FREDERICK MORTON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Behind the feeling of nationalism—the sense of being a group of people with a special mission on earth, which nearly every nation in Europe has—there is some kind of epic, some sort of folk myth, which sets forth in its earliest and most primitive form the things those people think they are. In a sense the *Nibelungenlied* tells us what the Germans think they are in their eldest incarnation.

*Cohen:* Yes, Mr. Bryson. The *Nibelungenlied* is a collection of the myths and stories which grew up along with the development of those people that make up Germany and Austria and Central Europe.

*Bryson:* That would include all the people that we call Germans now, Mr. Cohen—not particularly the Germans who took charge of the destiny of Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, the Prussians.

*Cohen:* It would include all Germans, the people of greater Germany, as the people who took charge emphasized. The historical parts of the *Nibelungenlied*, had their origin in a period from about 300 A.D. to 600 A.D., at the time of the German migrations, when the tribes were wandering back and forth in central Europe, seeking for the places which finally became their homelands.

*Bryson:* And doing in the Romans!

*Cohen:* And *being done in* by the Romans! A large part of the *Nibelungenlied* centers around the destruction of the entire Burgundian tribe, the tribe that was settled around Worms, which was attacked first by the Romans in about 430 and then utterly annihilated around 437 by Hunnish tribes.

*Bryson:* What I meant, Mr. Cohen, was that it has an added interest to us because, in our history books, we get only the Roman side of the Roman-German conflict, and here we get something of the German side. That's what you mean by saying this is where the Romans did them in. It gives the German side of the fall of Rome to some extent.

*Morton:* Yes, it does. Like the *Iliad* and, in a sense, like the *Aeneid*, it gives expression to the early experience of a people. In that sense it is a folk epic, but it is more than that. It provided what was the equivalent in those days of the daytime serials of radio today.

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*Cohen*: Of course you speak of its finished form, the form which it didn't assume until about 1200 A.D., when these scattered poems about different phases of Germanic history were combined into one poem and written down.

*Bryson*: Yes! The historical material concerns the time of the fall of Rome, as we fix it in our schoolbooks; but the actual writing of the poem would be about 1200 A.D. What you mean, I suppose, Mr. Morton, is that the people who were the first consumers of this poem could be compared with the people who now listen to adventure stories over the air. Why do you make that comparison?

*Morton*: Because the poem itself is divided into a number of adventures, each of which is fairly short, and lends itself to being told in one evening as the knights and the ladies sat around the fire-side in a castle.

*Bryson*: They actually were told in that way, weren't they, Mr. Morton? They were recited by wandering minstrels or singers who went around and made their living by telling these stories.

*Morton*: Yes, and that undoubtedly accounted for their great popularity at the time. In later years, though, the *Lied* was lost and remained so until the eighteenth century.

*Bryson*: Isn't that an important point? For about five hundred years this poem, which is now considered a national epic of the German people, just dropped out of their consciousness—and everyone else's. To what extent was the revival of it in the middle of the eighteenth century artificial, in that the Germans thought, "Now, look here, we had better have a national epic. Isn't there one lying around unused somewhere that we can appropriate?" When you were a schoolboy in Austria, Mr. Morton, was the poem offered to you as the very essence of your country's literature?

*Morton*: It was in a way. It was a vivid way of visualizing the early history of the country.

*Bryson*: And you took it as that when you studied it?

*Morton*: Yes.

*Bryson*: How old were you when you first read it?

*Morton*: I was about nine or ten. The *Lied* was spoken of as being the beginning of German literature proper as, in a way, the *Iliad* was the beginning of Greek literature.

*Cohen*: Do you mean that, in its finished form, it was considered as the beginning of German literature or in its broken form, that is, in the form of the separate ballads which went into the making of it?

*Morton*: In its finished form, which arose at about the time of one of the first German poets whom we know by name, Walter von der Vogelweide. He came only shortly after the period of the *Nibelungenlied*.

*Bryson*: What's the character of these stories? What are they?

*Cohen*: Since it was mentioned that, in the past, the *Lied* was the equivalent of our daytime serials or comic books, the adventure element of the story in them is the one that should be considered first.

*Bryson*: As a matter of fact, aren't they more stories than any-



thing else? Is there actually, Mr. Cohen, very much character analysis, or description of circumstance, or word-painting of any kind in them? Aren't they pretty stark? They're very direct. They're stories. These people are adventure heroes, and heroines.

*Cohen:* They are, indeed, except where they appear in works by modern authors, even in such nineteenth-century authors as Wagner, or Hebbel in his *Nibelungenlied* dramas, or in Paul Ernst's twentieth century *Nibelungenlied* dramas, the characters have a remote, outline-like quality. They suggest some of the rigidness and angularity of figures in stained glass windows and tapestries. They have no interiority. This quality makes the *Nibelungenlied* remote in feeling and interest for our minds.

*Bryson:* It is not so close to us even as Virgil—who was more than a thousand years earlier—is it?

*Cohen:* What you said last week in your discussion of Virgil, that he is so astonishingly close to us, is, I think, emphasized further by the remoteness of this poem which comes twelve centuries after Virgil. Virgil was interested in precisely the things that we are. He was interested in the minds of people. The author of the *Nibelungenlied* is not interested in psychology.

*Bryson:* He is interested in virtue and vice and knighthood and loyalty, however. Sometimes this poem reads to me like the old morality plays. Here's the man who stands for knighthood; here's the woman who stands for revenge.

*Cohen:* But he's interested in them only in their nominal aspects. There is never any real examination of what virtue or chivalry consists of.

*Bryson:* The people are only symbols for those virtues and vices.

*Morton:* Mr. Bryson, I can't agree altogether here. I may be prejudiced by my own early acquaintance with the epic.

*Bryson:* You may understand more by sympathy, too, Mr. Morton.

*Morton:* It seems to me that just because there is the lack of sophistication and psychological intricacy in the *Nibelungenlied*, there is a kind of naive innocence and spontaneity in it which is sometimes more convincing than the artifices of Virgil. In that sense, though it has none of the polish or the finish of the *Aeneid*, it brings me a little closer to those primitive human passions to which we are still subject today. In that sense, I think, it's still contemporary.

*Cohen:* Perhaps you are willing to make more of an imaginative effort and to expend more feeling on the bare outlines of the poem than most people are able to make. The *Nibelungenlied* is, after all, despite its origins, despite its original anonymity—because the separate parts of it are by authors whose names have disappeared—a work of art. Yet it's too artless. A work of art cannot be quite so artless as this and still retain our interest on all levels or as highly as something like the *Aeneid*.

*Bryson:* Let's take a look at the story, Mr. Cohen. It may be that the story itself is something that does not appeal to us as much as the story which Virgil used in the *Aeneid*. The hero is Siegfried,

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who possesses all the virtues, magical and human. He gets himself into a complicated situation where he has to serve his lord Gunther. He has to deceive Brunhild, who is a kind of goddess. Then Brunhild and Kriemhild, who is Siegfried's wife, get into a terrible quarrel, and the jealousy of two proud women comes into play.

*Morton*: That seems to be a timeless subject!

*Bryson*: A timeless subject, indeed! Siegfried gets foully murdered by Hagen, a knight who otherwise is the very picture of loyalty and knighthood. The rest of the book—in fact, most of it—is Kriemhild's long pursuit of revenge against those people who killed her husband Siegfried. In this version of the story—the one that we call the *Nibelungenlied*—the lust for gold, for the ancient treasure, of which Wagner and others have made so much, is a minor element in the plot. The main theme concerns a woman, Kriemhild, who, in the beginning, is quiet and modest, but who, because her beloved husband is killed because of the jealousy of another woman, spends the rest of her life in cruelty and violence, trying to get her revenge.

*Cohen*: Your exposition has been a little more generous, I think, than the poem deserves. What you have done, Mr. Bryson, is to draw on your collateral knowledge of the whole body of legend and history on which the *Nibelungenlied* grew. A very interesting thing, incidentally, happened with the material which is the groundwork of the *Nibelungen* epic. The story of Siegfried, the story of the *Nibelungen* gold, the story of Brunhild, the story of Kriemhild's vengeance, and the story of the destruction of Worms—all of these stories, which had their origin either in the myth-making mind or the actual history of the German tribes were in the air, so to speak, before the tribes which owned them separated. Then some of the tribes went to the north, some of them stayed in the region that now is Germany. Those tribes that went to the north, carrying this legend with them, produced, as their great works of poetry, the two *Eddas*, the prose *Edda* and the poetic *Edda*. All this material of which you speak is still retained in those *Eddas*. The elements which had interest for Wagner and which lent themselves to philosophic and thoughtful development are still there.

*Bryson*: You don't find any character interest in the *Nibelungenlied*?

*Cohen*: No! The part of the legend that remained in Germany—the part that the *Nibelungenlied* is directly drawn from—is an inchoate mass of broken stories and fragments which is not well put together.

*Morton*: Again my prejudice stirs me. To my mind, it is just because the old pagan elements which were so much present in the *Eddas* have been eliminated, that the *Nibelungenlied* is interesting, since the burden of fate has been transferred to the shoulders of the human beings themselves, and they are responsible for what they are doing. They are the heroes or the victims of their own will; they do not have to depend on the gods. Therefore, their tragedy is a human one, and their fate is not constantly being interfered with by the invisible agencies that are so much present in the *Iliad*.

*Bryson*: Then you think that Kriemhild's revenge is a picture of how a woman's life was ruined by her own passion, to get even with another woman, that there is here the difference between a Christian and a pagan version of the same material, and that this is a Christian drama of sin and retribution, Mr. Morton?

*Morton*: In many ways the later, twelfth-century version has become that. To my mind, that makes it more immediate.

*Bryson*: When the epic came back into German consciousness, in the middle of the eighteenth century, just before the flowering of German literature, what did it mean to men like Goethe and Schiller? Did it seem to them to be a Christian drama of sin and retribution?

*Morton*: Well, the Christian ingredient in the German literary revival wasn't too strong. What they saw in it primarily, I guess, was a semi-romantic story on which they could draw.

*Bryson*: But sin and retribution were still in it. They thought of it as a drama of morals, not of mere fate.

*Morton*: Oh, yes!

*Cohen*: This doesn't mean that Wagner regarded it as Christian material. Of course, he didn't, nor does it mean that he worked out the conflict which he drew from it in Christian terms. But the drama which he drew from the *Nibelungen* material is certainly one of sin and retribution, but it's not sin and retribution in a superficial or conventional Christian sense. It's a deeper sin and a deeper retribution—this lust for gold and lust for power, involving the destruction of the innocent forces of the earth, and the final destruction of the gods themselves because they have sinned. I doubt, however, whether the epic has been so transformed in the version we have that it now becomes a drama of fate and Christian retribution for sin. I don't think that ever happened, Mr. Bryson. In the twentieth century, by the way, the *Nibelungenlied* enjoyed a great revival in Germany, because it belongs to that blood-and-soil sort of literature that Nazi Germany favored.

*Bryson*: And suited what was almost a cult of violence which was growing in German civilization?

*Cohen*: Perhaps. But what was the important idea, really, which the man who was chiefly concerned with it was led to draw from it? Paul Ernst, in his *Nibelungenlied* dramas, *Kriemhild* and *Brunhild*, was concerned only with the idea of *Treue*, the idea that animates Hagen.

*Bryson*: Loyalty!

*Cohen*: Yes. That is the conception, which, ruling Hagen, makes him the most interesting character in the poem. He does all that he does—the violence, the wickedness, the cruelty, and the deceit—out of a sense of obligation to his king. His whole vengeance against Siegfried is directed by the idea that Siegfried has insulted the queen, Brunhild. It's this idea that Ernst draws out of the poem—the idea that loyalty is the necessary governor of a man's life.

*Morton*: There is a magnificence about Hagen, in contrast to the heroes of the Latin or the Greek dramas who always tried to seek their inspiration from the gods and follow them, or tried somehow to

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circumvent the fate which the gods prophesied. Hagen always disregards fate and does what he thinks he has to do.

*Bryson:* Even though he knows it's going to be evil in the end, Mr. Morton, doesn't he?

*Morton:* Not evil—destruction.

*Bryson:* That's right—destruction and disaster. But isn't there something of great significance in this most interesting character, Hagen. He's deceitful, violent, and cruel, but he's loyal, not to an ideal, not to the gods, not to virtue, but loyal to his master. That is a conception that influenced so much of German thought in the nineteenth century. Is that not true?

*Cohen:* That seems to me too much of a generalization and unfair to much of German thought, really. Also I think it makes necessary our going back to another point, which is the bad joining, the bad bringing together of the elements in the *Nibelungenlied*. So much of what we find base in Hagen's character is derived from his springing out of these original legends which the author of the *Nibelungenlied* doesn't know how to handle. Of course, a picture could be made of Hagen, which would turn all of the qualities that you have characterized by dark names into bright ones. It isn't necessary to regard any of Hagen's action as being either deceitful or disloyal or treacherous or wicked or anything of that sort. A bright motive might be found for every one of his acts and a bright interpretation to the act itself.

*Bryson:* I think that's true. The question I was raising, without attempting to answer, was whether or not the single ideal of loyalty to a chief didn't seem, in the character of Hagen, to outweigh everything else.

*Cohen:* Yes, he used that excuse, which is a medieval one, that Siegfried did not behave as a mere vassal to Gunther, that he was not sufficiently loyal to Gunther and that, therefore, he, Hagen, was justified in stabbing Siegfried in the back. That was the motive and the author of the *Nibelungenlied* used that to bring out all of Hagen's tremendous properties of will. Starting with the decision to slay Siegfried, Hagen went through with it regardless of consequences, and he carried it to its logical fulfillment. That fulfillment is the second part of the *Nibelungenlied*.

*Morton:* I daresay that, summed up in that way, it's easy to understand why the character of Hagen should have had such commanding importance in German eyes and for the authors who handled the *Nibelungen* material.

*Bryson:* I agree, Mr. Cohen, that we are far too glib in making generalizations about German character. But it is interesting that the German may be distinguished from the Latin epic, which we were talking about last week, and in which loyalty to a national ideal is what carries the hero all the way through. Here, the most interesting character is carried through by loyalty to a chief.

*Cohen:* And Hagen is the hero, I think, not only in a nominal sense. In every practical sense the hero is Hagen, who, by the way, survives from beginning to the end of the poem.

# AGRICOLA

## *De Re Metallica*

HERBERT HOOVER • JOHN U. NEF • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* This sixteenth-century book on mining is an example of the way in which a technological development is brought to a peak at a certain time in history. We are discussing the translation of it made some years ago by Mr. Hoover and Mrs. Hoover out of the original Latin, a translation which was done, as I can see, Mr. Hoover, with loving care and great scholarly thoroughness.

*Nef:* May I say here, Mr. Bryson, as a humble member of the craft of historians, that this edition of Mr. and Mrs. Hoover is a very remarkable achievement. When you remember that it was done in off-hours, late at night, after a hard day's work, and during vacations over a period of six years, you are filled with admiration, because, as a scholarly work, it not only deals with the book itself but with the whole background behind the book, running back to classical times. Moreover it explores every subject which the book treats—and it treats every side of mining and metallurgy. For any scholar, this would be a great achievement. After forty years—the edition came out in 1912—it stands up magnificently, and is a contribution of the first importance to history because the book is, as I think we're going to show this morning, a book worthy of the loving care Mr. and Mrs. Hoover gave it.

*Bryson:* I'm glad you said that, Mr. Nef, because your competence as a historian gives the compliment some authority. Mr. Hoover, you must have been struck by the importance of the book and its intrinsic interest, or you wouldn't have taken the trouble to produce it.

*Hoover:* Mr. Bryson, might I digress just a moment to mention that this whole program seems to me a bit incongruous, in view of our nearness to the edge of a world precipice. Nevertheless, we have to carry on with life and living, and, besides, what we say may

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furnish our listeners with a half-hour's escape from the other dread things that may be running through their minds.

*Bryson:* After all, Mr. Hoover, this is part of the civilization we're defending, isn't it?

*Hoover:* It is. Well, this particular book is one of a great group of literary products that resulted from the awakening of learning and, more particularly, followed the discovery of printing. It is a segment of the literary development of the Renaissance, which involved two or three phases. These men who provided a number of books on medicine and metallurgy and mining, of which there are two of special importance in the metallurgical field, were familiar with the classics, but the classics were available only in manuscript form until the time of printing. Printing made possible the general distribution of books and was an enormous stimulant to the advancement of learning.

*Bryson:* I don't believe, Mr. Hoover, that most historians give quite that much importance to printing. They seem to think that the mere rediscovery of the ancient manuscripts accounted for the Renaissance. To your mind, the technological change of printing itself was far more significant than they seem to think?

*Hoover:* I believe it was very important. The old manuscripts were available only in a few great libraries, and to a few people. Take a case like the one we are discussing. I doubt whether Agricola would have the opportunity to examine the classical material if it hadn't already been produced by the printing press at the time he began to work in this field. What is more, printing gave impetus to an entirely different thing—the ability of men of culture to investigate the inheritances from father to son, the actual practices in medicine and metallurgy and mining, and reduce them to books. There was no opportunity to do this before printing. And printing was a stimulus to do it.

*Nef:* Might I say here, Mr. Hoover, that I'm very much struck by the way in which these works of Biringuccio and Agricola fit into the general history of the Renaissance. They seem related to the art, as well as to the literature of the time, and what strikes one about Agricola's very important work is his extraordinary gift for observation. His is a remarkable description of the mines of central Europe, which were at this time the most important silver, copper, and lead mines in the world, and which had bloomed during the previous seventy years, from about 1470 A.D. What Agricola did was to look at these mines and metallurgical establishments with a piercing eye. And that was similar to what Leonardo da Vinci was doing a little earlier. What impresses one in all these men is their extraordinary gift for observation, which is new and fresh.

*Bryson:* That piercing eye is characteristic of the Renaissance, isn't it? It's the spirit of it.

*Hoover:* Yes. And it resulted in this summation of knowledge which had accumulated since the classic times. There had been the enormous gap of the Dark Ages, and these men brought knowledge to light, not only out of the old manuscripts of the classics, but they

brought to light the accumulated knowledge of that period of six or eight hundred years in between.

*Bryson*: Well, that knowledge of six or eight hundred years about the mining of silver and other metals, about medicine and other things, Mr. Hoover, passed from father to son and from master to apprentice, and so on. Was it ever summed up in theory, or was it left as a kind of craftsmanship?

*Hoover*: There never was any summation of it until the time of these books.

*Bryson*: And printing was necessary for that summation.

*Hoover*: I think it was.

*Bryson*: So that makes printing the technological means of making possible the modern philosophical and scientific approach.

*Hoover*: Yes. There were a few minor works prior to the books we're discussing. They were little booklets, in the nature of cook books, with recipes for metallurgical operations and surgical operations and so on.

*Bryson*: They were little "how-to-do-it books"?

*Nef*: Mr. Hoover, might I ask you whether, among the ancients, there was, so far as we know, any treatise completely devoted to mining and metallurgy, as Agricola's treatise is? I know, for instance, that Pliny had only two books out of some thirty-six or thirty-nine devoted to this subject.

*Hoover*: No, there is no complete work of this sort in the classic period.

*Bryson*: However, Mr. Hoover, the Greeks and the Romans of the classic period had rather substantial mining operations, hadn't they?

*Hoover*: Oh, very. The fact is that the great period of glory in Athens synchronized entirely with the period when they were getting large revenues from the mines of Laurium.

*Bryson*: So the civilization and empire of Athens was established upon a technological basis, just as modern empires are.

*Nef*: And yet, Mr. Bryson, one thing that strikes us is that the classical peoples, at least as manifested in the work of Plato, Archimedes, Pliny, Ovid—and Agricola deals specifically with Ovid—regarded the heavy exploitation of the treasures of the underworld as somehow indecent. They thought it should not be pursued too relentlessly, and they objected to it.

*Bryson*: They were a little uneasy about taking things out of the earth?

*Nef*: They were, indeed. And what struck me in reading this work of Agricola's, as I did last night again, after having read it several times before, was that the whole of Book I is an answer to this argument of the ancients. So far as I know, although my knowledge in this field is not considerable, it is the first answer, and a very effective philosophical answer, whether you agree with it or not.

*Bryson*: Do you think, Mr. Hoover, that Agricola felt he had to do this to justify his profession, or was it just *pro forma*?

*Hoover*: Oh, he was really a great scholar. He had been edu-

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cated in German universities and, subsequently, in the Italian universities, as a doctor; and it happened that one of his earliest appointments was as doctor at Joachimsthal, which was in the center of the then European mining boom.

*Nef*: It was, actually, the most important mine, Mr. Hoover, and the most productive of silver, in all the world at that moment.

*Hoover*: Incidentally, Agricola had an interest in one of those mines, and he seems to have accumulated a competence out of it.

*Nef*: He talks a lot about the shares in mines, doesn't he?

*Bryson*: He discusses how they are financed, as well as built. Well, Mr. Hoover, in the actual body of the book, does he give what was for his time, and perhaps for some time after, the best possible summation of methods of mining, of smelting, and of the uses of metals?

*Hoover*: Oh, the book was the standard textbook on these subjects. It covers probably two hundred metallurgical processes. Some of them had been described before, but never with so much clarity and ease of understanding. This book, plus Biringuccio's *Pirotechnia*, were the two textbooks of the whole of the metallurgical industry, I should think, for a hundred and fifty years.

*Bryson*: What struck me—I read it as a complete layman, Mr. Hoover—was the extraordinary clarity and the illuminating quality of all the illustrations and diagrams which are reproduced in your text, and also in the modern reproduction of your text.

*Nef*: Might I say here, Mr. Bryson, that these served as a kind of guide in the very remarkable development of mining and metallurgy which took place after Agricola's death in Great Britain. The mines of Germany and Austria-Hungary lost their importance in the last half of the sixteenth century. England, and to some extent Scotland, took over the torch and developed mining, but developed it in quite a different way, because the emphasis in England was on iron and, above all, on coal, whereas the mines of central Europe had been for the mining of precious and semi-precious metals. Nevertheless, Agricola's diagrams were actually used in England, and England actually went beyond Agricola—but no one there developed any systematic treatise on the subject.

*Hoover*: There was another development stemming from this book. You remember Pizzaro's seizure of Peru and the subsequent discovery of the mines on the *Cerro Gordo de Potosí*, which were probably the richest mines of all history for a considerable period. Well, after they had worked the pure native silver off the top of those mines they came up against metallurgical problems. The record indicates that a copy of *De Re Metallica*, with an iron binding, was chained to the altar in the Cathedral of Potosí and that the priest translated it to the miners to teach them the processes to be used. Those same processes moved from Potosí northward into Mexico, and from there to the Comstock Lode in Nevada.

*Nef*: In this connection, Mr. Hoover, it is ironic that this use of Agricola as a sort of bible in Potosí—which I didn't know about at all; it's a most illuminating story—should, in a way, have cut the



ground from underneath the German and Central European mines, because Europe was flooded with silver and gold from South and Central America, beginning in the sixteenth century, and this so cheapened silver that it became no longer profitable to mine on such a scale in central Europe.

*Bryson*: It's another illustration, Mr. Nef, of the fact that technology is very often destructive of nationalism. You can't keep it within borders. But, in this defense of mining in the beginning of the book, Mr. Hoover, Agricola says it is wrong to think that mining produces wars, or that it leads to wars. I wonder what Agricola might think of his own principles in the world today, when we have been somewhat immoderate in taking metals out of the earth and somewhat destructive in their use.

*Hoover*: Among the other works written by this same scholar is a diatribe on war in general and an explanation of its futilities. Agricola was a pacifist of the first order. If I get any philosophic reaction out of it, it is that he felt that the development of industry gave people better occupations than being soldiers. He comments on that a number of times. I think he felt that peaceable callings might lead men away from a more violent life—which was somewhat the habit at that period in world's history.

*Nef*: Mr. Hoover, his specific argument in Book I is of some interest in this connection. He uses the argument of Aristotle, namely that moderation in all things is desirable. He answers the ancient thesis that mines will be exhausted, and says that the mines are inexhaustible, provided they are used with moderation. Now, since his time the production of iron has increased something like eight hundred-fold, for a population of only seven or eight times as many—which means a hundredfold per capita increase in the output of iron. So moderation, Mr. Bryson, has been somewhat forgotten.

*Hoover*: I think there's an answer to that. Moderation might have been very desirable with the kind of deposits, and the grade of ore, that they were working at that day and date. You have to remember that our present production of metals is the product of cheapening costs which enable us to work lower and lower grade deposits. Everytime we invent something in mining practice or in pure science that may directly apply, we have lowered the cost of production. We have had an enormous increase in the amount of deposits available, and a large part of the increased productivity today, as compared with that of four hundred years ago, is the result of scientific progress to which this man contributed.

*Bryson*: Beside his scientific importance and philosophic dignity, Mr. Hoover, in your translation there shines through the technicalities some very curious human qualities in this man. I was delighted to discover that he took up the question of the dowsing rod, the forked stick, and rather dismissed it, skeptically. He doesn't seem to have thought that it was a very good idea. If I'm not mistaken, there are controversies going on right now as to whether you can discover metals with a forked rod.

*Hoover*: Yes. This book presents the first description of a forked

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stick for finding metals or water. But Georg Agricola was very skeptical about it. He gives a great number of reasons why it can't possibly be so. Nevertheless, that myth, or that practice or superstition, has survived to this day, and we don't need any better evidence than Kenneth Roberts' recent book about *Henry Gross and his Dowsing Rod*.

*Nef*: I even know an English professor of great eminence, Mr. Hoover, who, when he goes off into the country, says he can gather ideas as to what's underneath and in the soil with a little forked stick! It's interesting that where the English went beyond the Germans in the period following Agricola was with the discovery of the *boring rod*, with which they actually bored into the earth and brought up examples of the underground material.

*Bryson*: And there was nothing magic about that, Mr. Nef.

*Nef*: No, that was looking at the business in a more direct way even, in one sense, than Agricola looked at it.

*Hoover*: As to the forked stick, if I may go back to that for a minute, all the geologists and the engineers, in spite of Mr. Kenneth Roberts, will tell you that, if you keep away from rocky areas and mountainsides and a few selected places, the earth contains water at every point, and you can't miss it if you want to go on down. Your forked stick is going to work everywhere, even where the eye would determine that there might not be water. Agricola points that out.

*Nef*: He's very modern in his knowledge.

*Bryson*: But at the same time he's very medieval in his spirit. Not very far from the passage where he dismisses the still current idea that a forked stick will locate metals and water, he says that in the mines there are many spirits, and you have to look out for them. Do miners still think there are spirits in the mines, Mr. Hoover?

*Hoover*: I don't think they do much any more. But in mining lore over centuries there is some background for belief in spirits. When you open a mine, rocks fall off of the roof and you hear sounds and cracks and creaking; and the miners always attributed those things to some kind of spirits.

*Bryson*: Evil spirits?

*Hoover*: No. Most mining lore is filled with benevolent spirits. These noises were supposed to be warnings of accidents that might happen if you didn't look out. And the multitude of gnomes and dwarfs and elves, produced as figures in the mining areas, are all of benevolent aspect.

*Nef*: Mr. Hoover, as late as the time of Robert Boyle, that is to say in the late seventeenth century, this idea about subterranean spirits and demons was still current. And Robert Boyle thought it worth inquiring of the ore mines whether they had these demons.

*Bryson*: Mr. Hoover, does a book like this mean anything today, except for its historical interest?

*Hoover*: No, it has no practical value today, although great numbers of the processes which we use today are, in principle, the

same as are illustrated in this book. Our technology has gone far beyond it.

*Bryson*: That's characteristic of books on technology, isn't it?

*Hoover*: Oh yes. This was a contribution to the history of a great profession. As such, it has certain inspirational values to the profession.

*Nef*: What makes it endure is its philosophical implications for the change from ancient mining and metallurgy to modern mining and metallurgy.

*Hoover*: Agricola represented the point of revolution from the whole vacant period of the Middle Ages into what subsequently became modern industry.

*Bryson*: And you could say that this is, in a sense, the neglected industrial side of the Renaissance. So much is written about the literary, historical, and artistic sides of the Renaissance, that most people don't realize it had had an industrial side, too.

*Nef*: The whole thing, Mr. Bryson, is of a piece. That's what we should bring out as historians. History is everything that people do, and it's all interrelated.

*Bryson*: And this contribution that you and Mrs. Hoover made, Mr. Hoover, is not only a contribution to the history of your own profession, but a contribution to the history of civilization and the record of a landmark in human thought.

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# DA VINCI

## Notebooks

HARVEY N. DAVIS

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GERALD WENDT

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I suppose Leonardo is best known as the painter of a very famous portrait of a woman. But, when one speaks of the Mona Lisa, he usually says something also about Leonardo being a typical renaissance man of all talents and all achievements. Yet it's also generally remarked that he was astonishingly incapable of finishing anything. Now, what's the origin of a reputation like that?

*Wendt:* Most people will think that the Mona Lisa is a superbly finished job, Mr. Bryson, and so is The Last Supper. The reputation to which you allude is based on the rest of his work, outside the field of painting, where he did so many things only in a preliminary way.

*Bryson:* Even the Mona Lisa, Mr. Wendt, was supposed to have been almost wrested from his hand, because he kept on working at it. It seems finished to us, but wasn't he supposed never to have been satisfied with it?

*Wendt:* Oh, I'm sure he was never quite satisfied with anything he did. The *Notebooks* are a compilation of notes that he made, including thousands of drawings and thousands of sketches and pages of memoranda of all kinds, and he never did publish them. They were more or less discovered near his death and were regarded as being a thing that should some day be gone over; but he never printed them.

*Bryson:* What's the purpose of the *Notebooks*? He didn't publish them. Were they the foundation of a book, or a series of books never finished? Were they things out of which he was going to derive books? Or were they something else?

*Wendt:* I think they were simply the thing he wanted to do. He made his sketches for possible future reference, for possible aid to other students. I suppose he hoped some day he'd do a book out of them; but he never did get around to it.

*Davis:* I had a theory that he did them just because he loved them.

*Bryson:* Did them for fun, Mr. Davis?

*Davis*: He did them for fun! It was the natural outpouring of a mind full of curiosity, interested in everything that came under his eye, with little attempt to synthesize ideas out of them. This was just his reaction to a world around him.

*Bryson*: It strikes me as one of those extremely important accidents in history, because, if the *Notebooks* had never been discovered, most of the greatness of Leonardo would have been lost to our contemplation. We wouldn't have known how great a man Leonardo was. We'd have known he was a great painter and we would have heard something about his greatness as an engineer. But the vast range of his curiosity never would have come to our attention.

*Wendt*: Of course, he was a real public figure. He was a manager of all sorts of pageants and festivals, and well-known at his time. But the big job on which he spent most of his time wouldn't have been appreciated at all.

*Bryson*: What do you mean by his "big job," Mr. Wendt?

*Wendt*: His big job of investigating the world—his leadership as an observer—in putting down the principles of flight and the principles of inertia and things like that. These things, which he first looked at, wouldn't have been appreciated at all. But he didn't mean to teach, you know. He has a statement that his great drawings in anatomy wouldn't be of much value to students, because it would be better for them to do their own dissection.

*Bryson*: As if they could have seen what he could see!

*Davis*: Of course, we think of Leonardo da Vinci as a painter primarily, and yet the number of things that have come down to us from his brush are surprisingly few.

*Bryson*: How many, Mr. Davis?

*Davis*: In our collection on Leonardo da Vinci at Stevens Institute, Mr. Bryson, we made a list of the currently existing paintings that we believe are his, and the list is exactly eight.

*Bryson*: Only eight that he actually is known to have finished as paintings?

*Davis*: There were two or three of those eight appearing in two different versions in different galleries; and last winter, in Florence, I came across two more attributed to him in the Uffizi, one of which probably was largely completed by his students, and the other of which is a large cartoon barely finished. The central figure in this one, the Madonna, probably was done by Leonardo's own hand. There may be as many as a dozen.

*Bryson*: There might be a key to his character here, Mr. Davis. I wonder if you remember one time, when I was visiting Stevens and you were showing me the superb collection of Leonardo materials that there is there, I asked you why you were acknowledging Leonardo in a school of engineering. I remember that you put me distinctly in my place by saying that, first of all, Leonardo was an engineer. How did he get to be an engineer when he was one of the greatest of the world's painters?

*Davis*: I think I remarked that there were eight paintings and eight thousand engineering drawings.

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*Bryson:* But painting, certainly, was not just a recreation for this man.

*Davis:* He started as a painter. There's no question about that.

*Bryson:* All right! How do you go from being a painter to being one of the most comprehensive observers of the world of nature that anybody ever was?

*Davis:* You start by wondering whether you are rendering the anatomy of the human figure right.

*Bryson:* You think most painters worry much about that?

*Davis:* I suspect they do more than I realize, not being a painter myself. In Leonardo's case, with his active mind, he insisted on finding out what it was that underlay the skin of the model that he was trying to paint, and that led him into his extraordinary series of anatomical dissections and drawings.

*Bryson:* That was a dangerous business in the fifteenth century.

*Davis:* Very!

*Bryson:* He was in danger from the church.

*Davis:* But he mentions having dissected some twenty cadavers of both sexes. I've always wondered where he got them.

*Bryson:* In that day they were not supposed to be available and not supposed to be touched.

*Wendt:* I remember his discussion on the paintings of birds, which illustrates the point that you are trying to bring out, Mr. Bryson. In order to render the bird, he really had to study the bird, its structure, its wings, its feathers. So he had to study flight; and, in order to understand flight, he had to understand the winds; so he digressed far off into a study of air pressure and the flow of winds.

*Bryson:* And made an airplane!

*Davis:* He made an idea for one.

*Wendt:* He made an idea for one which is perfectly valid, as a matter of fact.

*Bryson:* You mean his airplane would fly, if we could build it now?

*Wendt:* If it had any motorpower, yes! The principles of the plane, of the wing, as we call it, are those of today.

*Bryson:* You'd have to have the automotive engine, however, to make it go.

*Davis:* Yes, and you'd have to have mathematics.

*Bryson:* Now, that's a point. You have to have the mathematics. But he did make a plan of an airplane. You say he made other engineering devices and engineering drawings, Mr. Davis. What were they?

*Davis:* He did a great deal in hydraulics. He had a great part to play in the construction of canals and of locks and of lock gates. He even went so far as to talk about a rapid transit subway system for the city of Milan. Since the fastest transport that he knew of at that time was boats, he proposed to dig a series of tunnels under Milan and flood them with about four feet of water and run boats on them.

*Bryson:* And we've carried out that scheme in the "Tunnel of Love" at Coney Island.

*Davis:* Yes! Leonardo also did a great deal of military engineering for the Duke Sforza.

*Bryson:* So he studied flight, hydraulics, fortifications. . . .

*Davis:* And engines of war. There is one place in the *Notebooks* where he describes how to make a cannon by taking iron rods, like barrel staves, and holding them in position with hoops of iron around them.

*Bryson:* Was that an advance over the cannon of that day?

*Davis:* Yes. He also developed a Gatling arquebus in the center of which a boy sat. As the rotating part came around, the boy put the arrow in place, and, when it reached the right spot, it shot.

*Bryson:* Sort of a Gatling gun.

*Davis:* The interesting thing to me is that he proceeds to say that you could build five of his super-arquebuses for the cost of one cannon, and then he goes on to inquire which will pay. There's the basis of our modern economics of engineering.

*Bryson:* Did he invent an interchangeable part?

*Davis:* No, he didn't come to that. But to answer questions like that he proposed you've got to go into the theory of war. It's like asking nowadays whether you had better build one battleship, or six super-bombers. It isn't a question of the relative cost particularly. It's a question of what you want to do with them.

*Bryson:* So, in all this work he was trying to solve practical problems. He was trying really to meet a need.

*Davis:* On the military side there is no question but that he was solving practical problems.

*Wendt:* That was because he was working for the Duke of Milan. He was both civil and military engineer for the Duke.

*Bryson:* That's the way he made his living?

*Wendt:* That way, and as a manager of pageants and festivals.

*Bryson:* Isn't that combination interesting? This man, who was a superb artist, one of the greatest painters that ever lived, and obviously must have been a great sculptor, too, although he never finished his sculpture, made his living directing pageants!

*Davis:* Most of the sculpture was for the pageants, weddings, and things of that sort.

*Bryson:* Much of it was ephemeral but, when he had a chance to do something permanent, he never finished it. I think we're beginning to get clues to the man's character.

*Wendt:* He'd be ideal for a modern world's fair, wouldn't he?

*Bryson:* He would, indeed. But what's the reason that he never finished much? Is there anything to explain that? His whole life seems to have been a perfect flood of unfinished projects.

*Davis:* Perhaps he was like what we educators call multi-aptitude boys—boys who have so many gifts that they are very likely to spread themselves too thin. Life comes too easy to them. I have often offered to bet a multi-aptitude boy out of high school five dollars that he wouldn't last through the freshman year in college—on the

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general theory that if he did it was worth the five dollars. But the grass in the next pasture is so much greener to one of these boys that he scatters himself all over the place. I have a feeling that Leonardo had that kind of mind.

*Bryson*: On a much higher level, I suppose, than anybody else we know of.

*Davis*: Oh, yes, no question about it—a marvelous mind!

*Wendt*: Mr. Davis, what ever became of the great statue that he erected to the Duke? He keeps talking about the statue, and his horse.

*Davis*: Did he ever cast it in bronze?

*Wendt*: I think he never did.

*Davis*: I think he never did either, and I think that the French destroyed the plaster model for it.

*Wendt*: That explains so much of the futility of Leonardo, Mr. Bryson. All these things were conceived and planned, and then not followed up.

*Bryson*: Futility from the standpoint of ourselves, Mr. Wendt, who would have inherited what he did. What I'm trying to get at is: what was the quality of the man's life? Was it futile to him?

*Wendt*: He had a good time!

*Davis*: Had a grand time! He enjoyed life thoroughly. He charmed everybody that he came in contact with. He was an expert musician. He could win the birds out of the trees with his lute. My impression is that he got more fun out of life than any other historical character I know about. Don't you think so, Mr. Wendt?

*Wendt*: Yes! It seems to me, Mr. Davis, that he's the kind of man who'd say, "I've never done a lick of work in my life because everything I've done has been fun; it was always fun, and interesting." That was the chief reason for which he did things.

*Davis*: Except, Mr. Wendt, for those things which he had to do to hold the job with which he made his living.

*Bryson*: Those were the pageants, and the canals.

*Davis*: And the military works. With those things he produced practical results.

*Wendt*: It seems to me there's a little more than that, Mr. Bryson. If you look at his scientific work, he had rather brilliant hunches, following painstaking observation—a hunch about the principle of inertia, and about the laws of gravity, and the circulation of planets around the sun. But he never followed them through like the great men that followed them.

*Bryson*: Why didn't he? Is that because he himself didn't have the capacity, in the sense that he lacked the generalizing power? Or, perhaps, in the late fifteenth century, the necessary intellectual tools weren't available. There wasn't a highly developed mathematics at that time, was there?

*Wendt*: Well, there was enough for Kepler. This was the time when America was discovered. His great work for the Duke of Milan was between 1482 and 1499. Interesting enough, the discovery of America is never mentioned anywhere in the *Notebooks*.



But that was the time. He had tools. He was convinced, for instance, that the sun does not move, and he says so in so many words; but he does not go on then to construct the planets circulating around the sun. I think he just didn't have enough mathematics for that.

*Bryson*: He didn't have enough mathematics for that. Is that because he himself was not mathematically inclined?

*Davis*: I think so! I think that he didn't have the quantitative, mathematical kind of a mind. He was an observer.

*Bryson*: And he also didn't have much tendency toward abstraction, toward high generalization, did he?

*Davis*: I think that is true.

*Bryson*: Did you ever have a freshman in Stevens get up and say, "Why should I study mathematics? The greatest engineer that ever lived didn't have any."

*Davis*: Not quite!

*Wendt*: Well, let's not be hard on Leonardo, Mr. Bryson! Remember that he started as a painter, and did not learn from books. His great contribution is the truth that science is observation and not the following of authority. He never did learn anything from books, and it's hard to learn mathematics if you have to do it by yourself.

*Bryson*: And this a long time before Bacon's rejection of the old ideas of science, isn't it? This is going to the thing itself, long before anybody started generalizing about going to the thing itself. I'm not being hard on Leonardo. I'm trying to locate exactly what happens. What is the character of a man who has what seems to be in many ways the best endowed mind that there ever was? In so many aspects of the power of intellect and artistic expression, this man is just beyond comparison. Yet, if it hadn't been for the mere accident that somebody discovered this collection of notes, we would know only vaguely that he was a great engineer and a great director of pageants, and that he did eight or ten beautiful pictures. But there is so much more to him! He's like the iceberg, nine-tenths of which never got discovered. That seems to me to require some explanation. Why didn't this man want people to know about himself, know about the range of his achievements? Was it lack of vanity? He was supposed to be a rather luxurious and proud man, wasn't he?

*Wendt*: Well, how about his handwriting? Is that involved?

*Bryson*: He wrote backwards, didn't he? He wrote so you'd have to read with a mirror.

*Wendt*: In your collection, Mr. Davis, is everything backwards?

*Davis*: Everything is backwards except for about twenty examples that have carefully been culled out of the *Notebooks* and published in the little book, *La Destra Mano*.

*Wendt*: You don't mean left-handed? You mean backwards with his left hand!

*Davis*: Yes! He wrote backwards with his left-hand. I don't know whether these particular examples of properly oriented writing were also done with his left hand or not.

*Wendt*: Was all this for the reason of secrecy?

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*Davis:* That has been suggested. I see no reason.

*Bryson:* I think it's necessary to emphasize, Mr. Davis, that we're talking about "back-writing" here. We're talking about writing which is completely unintelligible, even to a person who knows fifteenth-century Italian, unless you use a mirror.

*Davis:* Or unless you train yourself to read backwards, which he obviously did.

*Bryson:* He evidently learned to write that way.

*Davis:* I don't think that would be very difficult to learn. Anyone working with the *Notebooks* nowadays would not fuss with a mirror. He'd just read it backwards.

*Bryson:* Then, it wasn't much of a concealment, was it?

*Davis:* I don't think it was much of a concealment.

*Wendt:* My point is that he did it all his life, even when he was a young man, and, therefore, he didn't do it to hide his secrets. He just naturally did it that way. It seems to me he was a distinguished amateur who would have profited a great deal by a modern college education.

*Bryson:* What do you mean by that, Mr. Wendt?

*Wendt:* Well, he had no training in mathematics. He wasn't disciplined in a mental sense.

*Bryson:* You don't think that a modern college education might have spoiled him?

*Wendt:* No, I do not!

*Davis:* Thank you, Mr. Wendt!

*Bryson:* What would it have made him, a good engineer, and no painter?

*Davis:* I think he would have been a good scientist.

*Bryson:* Or a good painter and no engineer?

*Davis:* If he had had a little bit of mathematics he might have been a great scientist.

*Bryson:* Would he ever have made the kind of generalization which began to come just after Leonardo when there was the great outburst of scientific theorizing?

*Davis:* That came a hundred years later, didn't it?

*Bryson:* Yes. I was thinking of the sixteenth-century mathematics, Leibnitz and Descartes, and the astronomical observations of Kepler and the theories of Harvey and so on. These are things that he was interested in. Anatomy begins to be a science and then came Newton's generalizations. What did Leonardo contribute to all that?

*Davis:* I've been waiting for that question, Mr. Bryson. Let's see what Mr. Wendt has to say.

*Wendt:* I'll give you two quotes from him. He says, for instance: every weight tends to fall toward the center of the earth by the shortest way. Now, that's the first step in the law of gravitation.

*Bryson:* Did Newton know that he said that?

*Wendt:* I don't think Newton knew it. I'm quite sure Newton didn't. Then, here again: the earth is moved from its position by the weight of a tiny bird resting upon it. Well, there's the principle of

inertia which is basic again to Newton. Leonardo observed that; he deduced this much. But then he didn't go on to say: this explains the laws of the planets. His wasn't that kind of mind. He was no philosopher.

*Bryson*: Is that the point? He could easily have got the mathematics, but he doesn't have the power of highly abstract generalization?

*Davis*: He wasn't interested in highly abstract generalization.

*Bryson*: Is that why you called him once a "playboy of the mind," Mr. Davis?

*Davis*: An intellectual playboy! He was having a grand time in life and he was too busy to fuss with either students or publications.

*Bryson*: There's another element in all this that we haven't even mentioned yet. In spite of his reputation for great personal beauty and great personal charm, and his own description of what a wonderful person he was, there is absolutely no breath of romance anywhere in his life that we know anything about.

*Wendt*: May I quote from him again on that, Mr. Bryson? He says—with regard to other things, I may add, but he does say—"Neither promise yourself things nor do things if you see that when deprived of them they will cause you material suffering."

*Bryson*: You think he avoided romance on that count?

*Wendt*: I certainly thought so!

*Bryson*: I think someone else has given that as a reason for not using tobacco, but to give it as a reason for not having romance is new to me!

*Wendt*: He went all through his life with this idea. But thank heaven for a man who was to explore, who wanted to know, who was a tremendous stimulant to a great many other people who were in contact with him—although he did not stimulate subsequent generations, because these very *Notebooks* were not available to the public until centuries later.

*Bryson*: In other words, he did not aim to stimulate people, did he? He did this for himself?

*Wendt*: That's right!

*Bryson*: He didn't feel any responsibility toward other people?

*Davis*: I think that's probably true, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: That, again, is the quality of a playboy, isn't it?

*Davis*: He was too full of life to worry about the future.

*Bryson*: On the highest philosophical level, I suppose you could say that he's Aristotle's man of contemplation, that he's living on a level where the responsibility to others doesn't operate, and that he is making the highest use of the mind—which is to look at the world and try to understand it.

*Wendt*: In another sense, he's like Columbus—exploring, scouting all around rapidly, but only in the world close to him, which was relatively unexplored from a scientific point of view. He found all kinds of things to explore and try to explain. That was his great mission. The two big words that I like about him are "post-imagining" and "pre-imagining."

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*Bryson*: What do you mean by that?

*Davis*: He used his imagination to explain how the oceanic fossils could possibly have been up in the mountains. That was real scientific post-imagining. Also, he used his imagination to predict what flight would be, how people could live under water, and imagined what conditions would be like in the future.

*Davis*: I think his comment on why he would not tell people how to live under water was interesting.

*Bryson*: He wouldn't tell people because he thought an evil use might be made of such knowledge. In other words, if he had been capable of such generalizations as the scientists make today, he might have withheld his hand, because he thought other men would not know how to use them.

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# SHAKESPEARE

## *King Lear*

JOHN MASON BROWN • HOWARD LOWRY • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* We often think of Shakespeare as having derived his plots out of old tales, folklore, and more or less fabulous history. I've always felt that the most remarkable thing about *King Lear* is that Shakespeare took such unlikely material, this old Celtic legend, as his chief plot. If I weren't discussing Shakespeare and knew that I had to be reverent I should say that it was a stupid plot and a horrible plot. But, by sheer force of genius and poetry, Shakespeare has made one of the supremely great plays out of it.

*Lowry:* Professor Kittredge used to say that the only thing the old play did for Shakespeare was to give him the impulse to write a better one.

*Bryson:* Well, he did. Does anybody, Mr. Lowry, ever read the older play upon which he based *King Lear*? Is it extant?

*Lowry:* There are very few copies. It was published about the time that *King Lear* appeared.

*Brown:* May I speak as the ghost of Professor Kittredge, and inadequately? I agree so heartily that the play from which *King Lear* was taken, or the various sources of it, seem to me absolutely irrelevant. What matters in *Lear* is what Shakespeare did with it, and what he did with it—I will not quibble—is without any question the greatest tragedy to be read in the English language.

*Bryson:* That is quite a qualification, Mr. Brown—to be *read*. You mean that it's greater if one sits in his own home and reads it to himself than if one sees it on the stage?

*Brown:* I do not mean to indulge in a paradox. I almost think the measure of the greatness of *Lear* is its resistance to human performance. As Professor Bradley pointed out years ago, the essence of *Lear* can be acted, but the final dimension of *Lear* is something beyond the human throat and beyond the human body. I think Charles Lamb was right when he insisted that it was not stage-worthy. He said all you get is the old man tottering about with a

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walking stick. The dimension of *Lear* is not corporal. It is spiritual. It is something within the mind of the characters, and that is its glory. I must admit that this year, when Mr. Louis Calhern acted *King Lear*, for the first time I had to qualify my admiration of Charles Lamb's famous essay. Lamb had said the tragedy of Shakespeare cannot be acted, in *King Lear* particularly. I must now say that all of it cannot be acted, but enough of *King Lear* can come through to communicate the excitement and even the grandeur of it.

*Lowry*: I feel as you do, Mr. Brown. Reading is the main experience most of us had. But I don't despair of a production that may do some day what Harley Granville-Barker suggests, and produce a real drama, one that will not warp the readings.

*Bryson*: I am much interested, Mr. Lowry, in the assertion by Mr. Brown, and its acceptance by you, that the greatest play of the greatest of dramatists can be unplayable! As a man of the theatre, Mr. Brown, that's a rather astonishing remark for you to make. *Hamlet* is not unplayable, is it? And *Macbeth* is not.

*Brown*: No! No! No! They are certainly within realization. The question is whether all of *Hamlet* is within realization. There must be an area in any poetic dramatist with the mind and the music and the spirit of Shakespeare, that—and this Lamb pointed out—an actor's expression or even an actor's voice cannot reach. There is a reach beyond a physical dimension.

*Bryson*: And we get that in our own imagination when we sit and read?

*Brown*: Go back, Mr. Bryson, to your initial point—to the plot itself. When you put together the question of a divided kingdom and the set story of Edmund and Edgar, and Edgar's treatment of their father and all the multiple deaths and undertaker's problems in the last act, you do have something, which, from the point of view of modern probability, bothers an audience today. But, when you read the play, you are free from that skepticism. There are two planes in *Lear*. You may remember, Edmund says: "Thou, nature, art my goddess. To thy law my services are bound." Nature, of course, as Shakespeare used the word is not nature as we use it. Moreover, the conventions of disguise, in the instance of Edgar and other various characters of the play, are things which trouble us when we are confronted with living actors but not when we read the play.

*Lowry*: I think you're too much under Charles Lamb's influence, if I may suggest it, Mr. Brown. He never saw the play produced. He saw Nahum Tate's old play, which was not the Shakespearean play. It is the one that had the happy ending. Moreover, Lamb was bitter about the undue weight of scenery, you will remember. In his essay he is out to get the people who have cluttered up the stage with all sorts of bric-a-brac.

*Brown*: Well, that isn't really what I think he was about at all—if we may agree to disagree agreeably on the Sabbath. I think what prompted the essay was the fact that he was irritated when he went into Westminster Abbey and saw a statue to David Garrick and some jingles under it putting Garrick, the actor, on the same

level with Shakespeare, the dramatic poet. That's the point of the essay, although it argued it from either side, I grant you.

*Lowry*: Well, you don't have to have a cluttered stage and, certainly, if you are going to have *Lear* well played, you ought to have a simple stage. Didn't you think that John Houseman, in Mr. Calhern's production, got a great deal of movement and fluidity into the play? I thought the Louis Calhern production was brilliant.

*Brown*: It was; and brilliantly played by him. I thought all the way through it was better than any *Lear* that I have ever seen—not that we in this country have had the opportunity to see good *Lears*. The British contemporary audiences have been luckier. They have seen Sir Laurence Olivier, and they have seen John Gielgud. We have seen only one Britisher, Donald Wolfert, who is described, you know, as the poor man's Gielgud—which, I think, is hard on Gielgud, and hard on the poor man. Also we have seen people like Robert Mantell, but I have thought they were all inadequate *Lears* until I saw Calhern. Where the trouble comes in the play is not so much in the scenery but in the usual acting of *Lear*.

*Lowry*: But, for example, in the whole twenty-six scenes, on a Shakespearean stage there would be only five times in the whole play where a property man would even have to move around.

*Bryson*: We don't accept that kind of bare stage production now.

*Lowry*: We need to restore it.

*Bryson*: I'd like to get back to the substance of this thing. Suppose for a moment we postpone this idea of whether or not *King Lear* can be played. What do we get when we read it? We've got these two old plots of the doddering king, who divides his kingdom, and finds that his daughters are not what he thought they were, and of the trustful old Gloucester who favors his natural son as against his legitimate son and finds that he's deceived. The play explodes in the very first scene with terrific violence, and you get the succession of violent things. How does it happen, Mr. Brown, that, sitting alone and reading, these successive impacts of violence do not do anything but stir us and give us a feeling of the almost intolerable beauty of Shakespeare's language?

*Brown*: Well, Mr. Bryson, there is so much more than beauty to it. There is a kind of Druid strength. There is a kind of Stonehenge quality—the feeling of something that is beyond moving, that has been there forever. When you read it the actual actors do not disturb you. Even with Mr. Calhern, and I never could blame him for this, when you come to the great speeches against the storm, and you have man speaking against nature, you may feel disturbed in the theatre because no throat can house or release that verse. But when you read, what you have is a play in which the man is more than a king in a storm. The man is a tempest. He is everything that is tempestuous. The basic antagonisms in nature are in *Lear*—tenderness, cruelty, violence.

*Lowry*: And yet the basic theme flows along. Those two plots aren't too hard to manage.

*Bryson*: You're still contending to have it played?

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*Lowry*: Yes, I am. Yes!

*Bryson*: But you would read it, wouldn't you?

*Lowry*: I prefer to read it, but I still believe it can be played.

*Brown*: I think Mr. Calhern proved that it can be played and made exciting, thrillingly exciting, in the theatre. I'm only trying to maintain that beyond even those excitements there is an area of glory and grandeur in *Lear*, which is more accessible to the reader.

*Lowry*: You remember the big guards that were in Calhern's first performance at the start, how they towered up like those Druid stones, at the very beginning of the play? That Druid quality seems to me very important. This is Shakespeare's examination of elemental humanity and its worth. Swinburne said that *King Lear* lacked the magnificence of the *Orestiad*, because, while Orestes suffered, the gods on Olympus were always behind him with a sense of law and order, but, in this world of Shakespeare, the gods aren't there. It's without benefit of clergy.

*Brown*: I don't know exactly what you mean by "benefit of clergy." It is not without benefit of Bullfinch because, oddly enough, in the middle of what is Druid England, you have a Roman god—not that that disturbs you at all. But what happens is far beyond the control of ancient gods. What you have got is nature at war with man, and man somehow being big enough to be at war with nature.

*Bryson*: Mr. Lowry's point, Mr. Brown, is that you do not find here, as you might in the Greek play that he referred to, any call upon the gods for help, nor any sincere feeling on the part of any of these people that they could be relieved of this or compensated for it, or that any judgment of the gods is being carried out?

*Brown*: There is only one place that I can see, Mr. Bryson, and that would be where Edgar tells Gloucester that the gods who make themselves honors at men's impossibilities, have saved him from his fall.

*Bryson*: Yes, that's one of the most terrible speeches in the English language.

*Brown*: And it is one of the most irreligious speeches ever spoken! But that is part of the agony. I think that you would have to demand a virtue of gods that even gods could not possess, if you expected them to have any sympathy for Goneril or Regan or for Edmund or for Cornwall. The characters are terrifying characters except for Lear, Gloucester, Kent, and Cordelia—if you can abide Cordelia. She always seems to me the first of the *Little Colonel* series and one of the most rapid women I ever met. Her untapped virtue is a source of incredible annoyance to me.

*Lowry*: Well, Cordelia's strength may be hidden since we hear so little of her. She has about a hundred lines in the whole play. But she is rather fine when she does come in, as in the awakening scene.

*Bryson*: Yes, when she's aroused at the end by her father's death—but she is rather a prig. She is a rather difficult person.

*Brown*: Well, she's undeveloped. She seems to me an even paler version of Desdemona. You have virtue in this case that does not get its own reward, I grant you, but it is an awfully unattractive virtue.



I think she's made pale on purpose because everything else is drawn in primary colors.

*Lowry*: Would you say that Goneril, Mr. Brown, is the chief character in the play?

*Brown*: Oh, I certainly would! She is one of the most evil characters ever known to be drawn in the drama.

*Bryson*: She seems to have no virtue, no real affection for anybody, no sense of trust or duty or anything.

*Lowry*: She doesn't seem much like Lear's daughter, does she?

*Bryson*: Isn't part of Shakespeare's theme the difficulty of these characters? That passion which is in Lear, the violence of character, is what makes the whole play explode—he just goes off the handle right at the beginning because he's disappointed in the way Cordelia answers his foolish question as to how much she loves him. Isn't part of Shakespeare's intention, Mr. Lowry, to show that, in his daughters, this quality works out to evil?

*Lowry*: Lear lets loose a great deal of evil, and he does it, as someone said, because he has the spirit of calculation so much more than the spirit of imagination. He tests love as an old man approaching death. There's something of the morality play in this. He wants to examine values, and his values are a hundred knights, reduced to fifty, then to twenty-five. He thinks he can measure affection.

*Brown*: Yes, but after the madness, what is amazing to me and wonderful in the writing of *Lear*, is that when the old fellow, in a fit of supposed lunacy, stumbles—and this is the final irony of the writing—it is then that he comes to his greatest moments of seeing the world realistically.

*Lowry*: Yes!

*Brown*: That is when his values are clear, and he sees beyond the fifty knights. That's when he sees passion for what it is. That's when he sees ingratitude for what it is, and power for what it is.

*Bryson*: And Gloucester sees in the same way.

*Brown*: Gloucester does! Absolutely! He gains his sight by being blinded.

*Bryson*: I was a little disturbed by your saying like a morality play, Mr. Lowry. It has none of that flatness in it.

*Lowry*: No! I don't mean it that way. Unlike *Othello* and *Hamlet*, where there is perhaps a more extended analysis of character in psychological terms, you have in *Lear* a kind of symbolism, which makes for the universal quality that the play finally gains.

*Bryson*: It's sheer passion?

*Lowry*: Yes, and it's more than that.

*Brown*: Don't you think, Mr. Bryson, that the great grandeur and the real excitement—and the plot, probable or improbable, silly, difficult, crowded, or anything you want, has little to do with this—comes, as it does not come even in *Hamlet* or *Othello*, just at that point when you hear something beyond what is encased in one human being, and you have a generality that somehow rises above the particular character.

*Lowry*: Yes, and there is character, too. The Elizabethan world

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thought of nature as an order. It had reason in it. Man belonged to it. And when children fell away from fathers, the whole society was violated. That is what Ulysses talks about in *Troilus and Cressida*, and it's not just a matter of Lear and his family, but of kingship and authority and men descending to the level of beasts—many times Edgar refers to animals. It's a cosmic thing. The whole cosmos is cracked.

*Brown*: It's an exploded universe! And what you have is the tremendous impact of the explosion, which is beyond the plot.

*Lowry*: And all this makes the final calm of the last part so overwhelming.

*Brown*: The greatest caption ever written for the tragic blueprint is the speech spoken after Lear's own beautiful death speech. It is the speech spoken by the ever-loyal Kent. Lear has died and Kent says:

Vex not his ghost: O! let him pass;  
he hates him  
that would upon the rack of this tough world  
stretch him out longer.

Lear, almost more than any of the great tragic characters, with all the bruising, with all the cruelty, and with all that sorrow and anguish that he suffered, is someone who has come full circle. He is fulfilled. The moment of death is there, and it would be cruelty not to release him from mortality.

*Lowry*: And, Mr. Brown, when Cordelia dies so suddenly—it is not necessarily inevitable in terms of the plot—her death comes as a blow right out of the sky. There the play moves out of the circumspect bonds of Aristotelian tragedy and into the tragedy that is implicit in the universe. When Albany says, "The gods defend her!" and the stage directions read "Enter Lear with Cordelia dead in his arms," Lear should be taken out of time at that point.

*Brown*: And with the dead Cordelia in his arms he makes that extraordinary speech, which is again simply beyond my tonsils and beyond final speaking:

Howl, howl, howl, howl! O! you are  
men of stones:  
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so  
that heaven's vaults should crack.

Certainly, the dimension is the dimension of the whole of nature and the whole world and beyond one man, even a king.

*Lowry*: I wonder sometimes if the reason we prefer to read *Lear* isn't that the poetry is less obvious and, therefore, perhaps less effective in the theatre than it is in some of the other plays? In *Macbeth* it is in great chunks all through the play. This is a simpler language. It's more controlled, and, in the theatre, you're apt to miss a great deal of it, because of its very simplicity.

*Bryson*: Isn't it one of the things that shows the depth of Shakespeare's intuitive artistic genius, that he uses this kind of language for this kind of play? He has simple characters. They are passionate. They are people. But they are simple people. How much historical

interest did he have in this? Was he trying to depict an ancient world, or was he talking about a tragedy that he thought underlay his own world? You were saying a moment ago, Mr. Lowry, that the family goes to pieces, kingship goes to pieces, and the Elizabethans believed in an ordered world. Does he feel that, underneath the ideal order that the Elizabethans wanted, and in which they lived a passionate and excited and romantic life, things were going to pieces? Or is this history?

*Lowry*: There is certainly the feeling that things are going to pieces. But I wouldn't regard *Lear* as a pessimistic play. The enduring thing in it is love and mercy and forgiveness, and the redemption of the man. Even at the death of Cordelia, for example, at the very end, when Lear puts the feather to her lips and thinks she's alive, that is not illusion; it's creation.

*Brown*: In that same scene, Mr. Lowry, you get the beautiful, glorious piece about the gilded butterfly and the gilded cage. That is the glorious thing you get throughout the play—the sudden moments of quiet, tenderness, and the high, almost unbearable reason. And then you get the other theme, "Heaven's vaults should crack," and throughout the play you feel that heaven's vault has cracked in the storm, the final great, irreplaceable and matchless storm in *Lear*.

*Lowry*: David Hume said that all tragedy lives by eloquence, but you couldn't make a very good case for that here.

*Brown*: Well, the eloquence is a special eloquence. I would go back to the words. The thing that excites me so in *Lear* is that in so many of the great tragedies, in *Othello* and *Hamlet* for instance, you have beautifully polished phrases and phrases that glisten by themselves; but in this play the emotion is such that it has taken possession of Shakespeare. You almost feel that he throws his speeches as if he were throwing not a rock but a boulder.

*Bryson*: I'm a little bit surprised at your saying that this play doesn't show eloquence.

*Lowry*: Oh, it has eloquence, but it is eloquence of a very special kind and a very simple kind.

*Bryson*: A kind that is implicit in its theme?

*Lowry*: Yes! For example, recall the two great lines toward the end where Lear says:

Never, never, never, never, never!

Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.

Compare that with the scene where he sees Edgar and starts stripping off his clothes. There you have the old imperious Lear who says:

Off, Off, you lendings!

Come, unbutton here.

But in the last part, with the gentleness and the whole sense of what he's learned, with a courtesy he says: "Pray you, undo this button." That's not like the closing speeches in other plays.

*Bryson*: Has he learned?

*Lowry*: Yes!

*Bryson*: Learned that violence brings violence?

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*Lowry*: More than that! Much more! He has learned a new conception of humility and of the love that cannot be calculated.

*Brown*: I think the foolish king of the first scenes has suddenly learned—if I may use a modern comparison—what God learns in *The Green Pastures*. It is what gives *The Green Pastures* its eloquence and its whole point. God learns that he, too, must suffer—that God is not perfect, that he has to suffer even as man must. That is the great moment, I think, when Lear learns that he, as the king, is not hedged and protected in any way.

*Lowry*: That's interesting because, you remember, he kneels three times in the play; first, when he thinks of the poor naked wretches in the storm. Then he kneels to Cordelia and asks her forgiveness in what to me is the greatest scene in the play. And then he says at the end: "We will go to prison and we will ask forgiveness and give it back and forth." He's so in love with mercy that he wants to go on playing it as a kind of a game.

*Bryson*: That takes us back to the Greeks, doesn't it, as so much in Shakespeare does. The gods have to suffer to learn.

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# DOSTOYEVSKY

## *The Brothers Karamazov*

ALFRED KAZIN • ERNEST J. SIMMONS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I suppose Russian novelists are more important as interpreters of their civilization to us Americans than novelists of any other European or foreign culture. Few Americans, after all, have traveled in Russia or come much in contact with Russian civilization; and our ideas about Russia, more than our ideas of any other country, are built up from our reading of the great Russian novels. Yet there never was a man more strikingly individual as a great novelist than Dostoyevsky. He had his own unique approach to life.

*Simmons:* That would seem, Mr. Bryson, to be a very fair statement. I suppose Dostoyevsky has contributed more to the American conception of what Russians are than any single great novelist. This book was Dostoyevsky's last great novel. It took him some two years to compose it. And, despite the fact that it is a book of some four hundred thousand words and that a Russian wrote it, its plot could probably be summed up in a sentence or two. Essentially, it is the story of a murder, in which two characters, the old father Karamazov himself and Dimitri, the eldest son, are rivals for the love of a woman, Grushenka. Smerdyakov, the illegitimate son, with the moral sanction of Ivan, the second son, murders the father. Dimitri is accused and eventually, on the basis of circumstantial evidence, convicted of the crime.

*Bryson:* Morally, he was guilty of the crime, wasn't he? He would have killed his father if he had had a chance to prevent his father from getting Grushenka away from him, wouldn't he?

*Simmons:* Yes! Morally, he himself felt guilty of the crime, and he so stated at the trial itself. I have had friends read this book all the way through and never be quite certain just who it was that killed old Father Karamazov.

*Kazin:* Well, there is more than a hint in the book that the whole family killed the father.

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*Bryson*: And that he needed killing, Mr. Kazin, if any man ever did.

*Kazin*: Yes, of course. We can't afford to forget, can we, that among the brothers there is one who, for Dostoyevsky and perhaps for many others since, is one of the greatest embodiments of man's spiritual genius. That's the youngest brother, Alyosha Karamazov, with whom the book begins and on whom it ends.

*Simmons*: But would you say, Mr. Kazin, that Alyosha is really the hero of this story?

*Kazin*: I would say that life is the hero of the story and that Alyosha is the conscience of the story.

*Bryson*: In a sense, Mr. Kazin, isn't each one of the five Karamazovs—the three legitimate sons, the illegitimate son, who actually does the murdering, and the old father himself—a different aspect of life and the life energy?

*Kazin*: Yes, Mr. Bryson. I think that the Karamazovs fascinate themselves and fascinate everyone else in the book because there's an excessive quality about them which can be attributed only to life itself. They aren't more wicked than other people, or more saintly; they're merely more alive and more continually alive. It's that effect of continuity all through the book, the unrelenting observation of what life is in every day and every hour, that makes the book so fascinating.

*Simmons*: Nevertheless, if you agree that it is life itself, really, that is the hero of this book, I think you would also feel that there is some one character in the book, let us say, that Dostoyevsky identifies himself with.

*Bryson*: Is that the saint, Mr. Simmons?

*Simmons*: I would not be certain whether it was the saint or whether it was Dimitri or whether it was Ivan.

*Bryson*: Let's get Ivan placed. Alyosha is the saint, Dimitri is the mere sensualist, and Ivan is the intellectual.

*Simmons*: Ivan is the intellectual and supreme rationalist, Mr. Bryson. Some critics have been convinced, of course, that Dostoyevsky really identifies himself most closely with Ivan. But I feel that Dostoyevsky was supremely ambivalent about Alyosha and Ivan, just as he had been ambivalent about the characters in some of his other novels. I feel that the characters of Ivan and Alyosha are expressions of the ambivalence of Dostoyevsky; that is, Dostoyevsky's whole search throughout his life was a search for God. And Alyosha, in a real sense, represents that search for God. On the other hand, Ivan represents a repudiation of God in Dostoyevsky's eyes.

*Kazin*: Wouldn't you say, Mr. Simmons, that Dostoyevsky lived like Dimitri, that he often, to his own chagrin, thought like Ivan, and that he wanted to be like Alyosha. Of course, one of the reasons why a novelist creates characters is that they are all alive in him. He is so many different people that only many characters can even begin to reveal the extraordinary multiplicity of life he has. And the different levels on which Dostoyevsky wrote the book and on which he lived his very tragic and yet very great creative life

certainly are reflected perfectly in the human trinity of these brothers, each of whom is a different faculty and each of whom is life itself seen from a different angle.

*Bryson*: Another point in regard to this attitude of Dostoyevsky's toward his own search for God and his embodiment of that in Alyosha is that he searches for God essentially in humanity, which he finds in the passions and the daily lives of actual human beings. There's something symbolic in the fact that Alyosha's spiritual advisor tells him to seek saintliness, not by coming into the monastery and removing himself from life, but by going back into the world and living the life of a normal man. That is, you find God by living, not by retreating from life.

*Simmons*: That's a good point, Mr. Bryson. You should keep in mind, however, that in Dostoyevsky's own eyes Alyosha is an incomplete character. Dostoyevsky intended to continue his characterization of Alyosha in still another novel. In that second novel he was going to represent Alyosha going out into the world, sinning, finding his way back into the monastery and possibly even returning once again to the world and, by suffering, achieve salvation. Now, of all these three legitimate sons, it should be understood, I think, that Alyosha is the only one who represents or who identifies himself with life itself. That is, Alyosha is the one person who attempts to live life.

*Bryson*: He is the saint.

*Simmons*: The saint.

*Bryson*: That's an unusual kind of saintliness.

*Kazin*: In the Russian mind, it's a Russian saintliness.

*Simmons*: Perhaps you could have it that way. On the other hand, Ivan is the kind of person who puts life up on the operating table and dissects it, without ever seeming to realize that the point is not to dissect life but to live life. Dimitri, of course, lives life, but the meaning of life frustrates Dimitri. It evades him. For him life is simply a struggle between good and evil in the heart of man.

*Bryson*: And altogether too much evil in his own heart, because of the Karamazov sensuality, which is in all of them.

*Simmons*: The evil tends to predominate in the case of Dimitri, but I would hazard the guess that of all the characters that Dostoyevsky ever created, in his own eyes Dimitri was the most typically Russian.

*Bryson*: Is it a Russian idea of saintliness that only a person who has sinned can possibly be a saint? They've been accused of that, you know. Thinking that you reach holiness only by way of sin.

*Simmons*: There's no doubt that Dostoyevsky felt that a man who sinned but who could repent for his sins was still a man who could be saved.

*Bryson*: Oh yes. But didn't they think that the man who had sinned and then been saved was on a more righteous level of saintliness than one who had never suffered a sin?

*Simmons*: Yes. Dostoyevsky on the whole preferred the sinner to what he would describe as the careful, cautious, calculating bourgeois type who never sinned.

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*Kazin*: Of course, to Dostoyevsky, Mr. Simmons, Russian Christianity and especially the Russian saintliness meant something else. It meant the consecration of life itself. We haven't mentioned, I think, one of the most beautiful and one of the most compelling scenes of this book, the scene in which Alyosha, walking about, lies on the ground and hugs the ground itself, feeling that in that very nearness to the Russian earth, he can in some sense consecrate and fulfil his own saintliness. Of course, we who live in more comfortable circumstances than poor Dostoyevsky did—and certainly have a happier life, socially, than Dostoyevsky had—tend also to be a little snobbish and condescending about the meaning of suffering in nineteenth century Russia. We mustn't forget for a moment that the tumult, the intensity, the extraordinarily prophetic quality of this book came out of a culture—nineteenth century Czarist Russia—in which the novelist had to pour all these things into a book because of the lack of political and social freedom. And we get that surcharge, that wonderful tension, with great control at the same time, because each writer—Dostoyevsky, perhaps, above all in Russia in this period—felt that he had to speak about man in the world; that is, man in Russia, to begin with, to the outside world. And suffering was a very real thing. I often think of those lines of Robert Frost, in an early poem of his, in which he says to a man: "How can we write the Russian novel in America, so long as life goes on so unutterably?" Well, for the Russians life went on very terribly.

*Simmons*: Do you think, Mr. Kazin, that Dostoyevsky was dissatisfied with life in the Russia of his day? I mean life in terms of the political oppressions that existed in Czarist Russia. Did he have any sympathy with the despotic rule that existed?

*Bryson*: What do you think, Mr. Simmons?

*Kazin*: (laughs) Is that fair?

*Bryson*: Well, after all, Mr. Simmons is a profound student of Russian literature. It's perfectly fair. He brings this matter up.

*Simmons*: Well, there's much reason to suppose that Dostoyevsky had an abiding conviction that the government existing at that time, despite many of its repressions, was the only government for the Russian people.

*Kazin*: Mr. Simmons, Dostoyevsky was reactionary, and he did accept the Czarist regime; he accepted the hierarchy; accepted anti-Semitism and all the rest of it. But he was much more deeply conscious of the suffering of the Russian people, a suffering which he perhaps could attribute only to the nineteenth century, to the gradually growing spirit of atheism. But the fact is that that suffering is what he's most conscious of. And it's just that suffering which has been most misinterpreted in Western countries—as though they're all a bunch of zanies, howling about. The fact is that his feeling for the individual character and the thing that makes these people live so vibrantly in our minds is Dostoyevsky's own compassion for each individual. And, of course, the place where they suffered was Russia, in the nineteenth century.



*Simmons*: But what did he attribute this suffering to, do you think, Mr. Kazin?

*Kazin*: I would say, Mr. Simmons, that he attributed their suffering to many causes. The first is the fact that they were human beings. The fact that a man is a human being places him on the spot, in Dostoyevsky's mind.

*Bryson*: It's a concept of the world.

*Kazin*: That's right. And, secondly, it's due to the apathy of Russia in the nineteenth century, to provincialism. Notice how often through this book, Mr. Simmons, he tends to kid the Western intellectuals, the little doctors and lawyers in these small towns who pride themselves on their little culture. But he knew, too, that these were pathetic attempts to get at the profound apathy and ignorance of the Russian masses.

*Simmons*: But don't you think, Mr. Kazin, that the suffering, as he understands it, comes out of the fulness of life of the Russian individual; that is, the need to go out in the world and live life fully? As a matter of fact, if Dostoyevsky thought that people particularly suffered in the mind, I think he would feel that the people in Western Europe were perhaps the victims of more repression than those in the Russia of the Czars.

*Kazin*: Here we're getting to a very valuable point, surely. Dostoyevsky pitied all Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans and Italians because they didn't live in Russia. But what Western—that is, non-Russian—suffering meant to Dostoyevsky was this: these people were divided. His great pride in the Russian character, the curious, deep, rather touching nationalism of this period, comes from his feeling that only in Russia is the heart, the man, and the mind all fully combined and alive in one. That is why, in a sense, the history of a family, the narrative theme that goes all through this book, is meant to be the history of a genius, a particular type of genius, which is the nineteenth century mind in Russia.

*Simmons*: Well, to get back to the characters themselves, I feel that Ivan prefigures both this need to suffer and also a repudiation of suffering. In the novel itself, in perhaps the greatest scene in the novel, in the section of the book called "Pro and Contra" and particularly in the chapter called "Rebellion," perhaps the greatest piece of literature that Dostoyevsky ever wrote, he attempts to dramatize the essential ambivalence of Ivan. Ivan has a theory, you know, in this novel. He feels that a struggle is going on between what he calls the man-God and the world-God. In Ivan's own ambivalence he would, of course, prefer to identify himself with the man-God. But before he can become a man-God, you see, he has to do away with the world-God. That is to say, he has to do away with God.

*Kazin*: This is the problem which Nietzsche so brilliantly prophesied for twentieth century man, too.

*Simmons*: You know, Mr. Kazin, Nietzsche felt that he learned most of his psychology from Dostoyevsky.

*Kazin*: His psychology. Dostoyevsky, who didn't read Nietzsche,

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could have said, however, that Nietzsche had given him most of his metaphysics. For Nietzsche said very simply that the problem of man in the nineteenth century was that God was dead. Therefore, he said, man had to be a superman, the famous *Uebermensch*. In all these startling prefigurations, Ivan is most startling as the Nietzschean hero, the man who wants to be the new man-God, and whom for that reason Dostoyevsky profoundly pities, for he can see ahead of him in the twentieth century the great pathos, even the tragedy, of this attempt.

*Bryson*: Is that what the Grand Inquisitor fable means, Mr. Simmons?

*Simmons*: Essentially, I think, Dostoyevsky is trying to resolve this dualism in the story of the Grand Inquisitor.

*Bryson*: Which is simply a little fable that Ivan recites to his brother.

*Simmons*: Yes. But it's a fable with implications that are positively tremendous.

*Bryson*: Of Christ coming back to earth and what kind of a reception He would get. He comes back to earth and He meets the Grand Inquisitor.

*Kazin*: He comes back to earth in Sevilla, in Spain. And it's the week that the old cardinal, the Grand Inquisitor, has been burning heretics. The old cardinal is ninety years old, and he sees Christ walking in, silently. Christ never says a word in this scene. The cardinal says, "Is it Thou? Is it really Thou?" And Christ looks at him. Then the cardinal has Christ put in prison and says to Him, "Thou hast come back to undo our work." Then the great monologue begins.

*Simmons*: "The great monologue" is correct. It is a supreme indication of Dostoyevsky's genius. At the conclusion of this wonderful scene, Christ, despite the desire of the Grand Inquisitor that Christ try to controvert him, simply kisses the Grand Inquisitor, silently, and is then released. Leading up to it, however, is the tremendous condemnation of Christianity—that is, Roman Christianity—that Ivan enunciates in his horrible stories of the persecution of little children. You remember, in that scene with Alyosha, Ivan tells Alyosha that he could possibly forgive God, as he phrases it, if only the guilty suffered. But what depresses Ivan is the fact that the guiltless, little children, suffer. And remember that those horrible stories that Ivan told about the guiltless little children were all real stories which Dostoyevsky had culled from various newspaper reports and the annals of Russia. At the end of his narration—and this always strikes me as the significant thing—Alyosha says to Ivan, "This is rebellion!" But when Ivan asks Alyosha if there is anybody who could forgive the sufferings of these little children, Alyosha says yes, there is one person who could forgive the sufferings—and that is Christ, himself, who had suffered for mankind and, therefore, has earned the right to forgive these sufferings. And it is precisely what Ivan was waiting for. And that leads him into the story of the Grand Inquisitor.

*Kazin*: And in that story, you remember, the cardinal himself—it's one of the most remarkable things in the book—though he belabors Christ for giving man too much freedom and says that the church is more important than man's freedom, nevertheless, himself seems to show his own sorrow at the necessity and again and again seems to be there waiting for Christ to answer him, to resolve his own ambiguity. One of the most incredible moments, surely, in the whole of world literature is that moment when Christ simply waits him out, listens him out, and then kisses him on the lips and silently walks out. The very force of this monologue shows the force of the cardinal's conviction that man needs bread, miracles, mystery, authority.

*Bryson*: And not freedom.

*Kazin*: And that freedom is dangerous for man. The cardinal, himself, though he preaches the joyful end of man's freedom—as how many preach it in our time—nevertheless knows that this, too, must lead to a new break-up in man.

*Simmons*: I think also, Mr. Kazin, that Dostoyevsky had even larger implications in this scene of the Grand Inquisitor. You're perfectly correct in saying that the Inquisitor, of course, felt that Christ had erred in giving man his freedom. However, in Dostoyevsky's own mind this whole question of authority—that is, the authority of the church—amounted to a form of atheism, and he connected this same authoritarian sense with the great revolutionary movement in the West, as well as with that in Russia, that is, with socialism. He felt that both these aspects were authoritarian and both were trying to achieve equality of man through slavery, through despotism.

*Kazin*: You remember that very prophetic remark early in the book, that socialism is, above everything else, the atheistic question? He knew that it wasn't a question simply of shorter hours or higher wages, wasn't even a question of a class struggle, but what man thought now of the God he had lived with for so many years and whom for the first time in world history he thought he could do without. There, surely, is the prophetic greatness of the book.

*Bryson*: And isn't it important to add that, above this tumultuous conflict of ideas and passions, he has a kind of detached irony and perspective?

# LOCKE

## An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

DWIGHT BRADLEY

MASON GROSS

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* John Locke is probably the best known of all the English philosophers nowadays. We attribute to him a good deal of the political thinking from which our Constitution and Declaration of Independence were derived. He speaks for a world which dominated the nineteenth century and a good deal of the eighteenth century. Whether or not he speaks for the world of the second half of the twentieth century might be quite a different question.

*Gross:* I think that's right, Mr. Bryson. Locke is particularly interesting because in this essay, as in everything he writes, he draws a picture of a world which was then a new world, a very exciting world, a world determined by the new discoveries in physics of Isaac Newton and a world determined by some of the new political ideas of the bloodless revolution. In this long essay, both indirectly as well as directly, he states the main presuppositions of this world, and he draws conclusions from it about man, and what man should attempt to achieve.

*Bryson:* The world of about seventeen hundred?

*Bradley:* Just about seventeen hundred. The essay was published in 1690, wasn't it?

*Gross:* And it's a world which is very attractive. It's a world in which, as you pointed out, our ideas of independence and liberty were developed. It's the world that was the presupposition of our American Revolution.

*Bryson:* What's the relation, Mr. Gross, between Locke's political ideas and these more strictly philosophical and metaphysical ideas that we are discussing today? Was there one?

*Gross:* Very definitely! I don't think in any way Locke is a systematic thinker, Mr. Bryson. He rambles on. He will say himself

that he rambles on, and his book is certainly one of the longest books that's ever been written. You've got the wonderful feeling that there's lots and lots of time and you can just take all of it you want to discuss these problems. He is interested in the world of science, but he is not a metaphysician. He doesn't go any further into metaphysics than Newton does, and Newton, of course, would not admit that he was a metaphysician at all. No, he's describing a world of nature, and in it you'll find man, man who has a mind, and man who has a body, and the body obeys the laws of Newton's physics.

*Bradley*: Yes! His concept of man's body and his mind was founded upon a peculiar kind of a dualism that developed out of the Newtonian physics, on the one hand, and out of the political and social feelings of the people of that time—out of the British Revolution—on the other.

*Bryson*: Now, Mr. Bradley, if you ask the ordinary intelligent and reasonably well-educated man-in-the-street in America today if the world is not made up of mind and matter wouldn't he say, "Of course"?

*Bradley*: Oh, I'm sure he would! There's a lag here. Locke's whole point of view was carried with such conviction, both politically and in the field of thought, that people have come to take for granted these maxims of his as being true without any particular criticism of them because, after all, they are here and this is the way we live. In a way, Locke represents a kind of a way of life that people have come to take for granted.

*Gross*: I think it's curious that this conception we have depends upon a certain conception of matter. If you're going to take the whole universe and divide it up just into two things—minds on the one hand and matter on the other—then it's very important what your conception of matter may be, because everything else in the world that isn't matter is going to be mind, and that was characteristic of Locke. Locke decided, for example, that matter had all the qualities of a colorless billiard ball, so that all the colors and all the scents and all the tastes all had to belong to mind.

*Bryson*: And, according to Locke, this colorless billiard ball, as you call it, existed without the colors and the incidentals and the secondary qualities that we attribute to it; nevertheless, it existed as an object without any qualities.

*Gross*: There is no doubt about that!

*Bryson*: It had extension.

*Gross*: It had size and it had shape.

*Bryson*: But no particular shape.

*Gross*: Well, each piece, of course, had a particular shape.

*Bryson*: Was that particular shape something we attributed to it or was that in the piece?

*Gross*: That's what you determine in your scientific investigations, what particular shape each particular piece has. The point that I was trying to make is that nowadays we have completely changed our conception of matter. The billiard balls went out of fashion long ago, at least certainly with the quantum theory, and yet we still keep

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this basic division. The minds now still have all the qualities that Locke and Newton assigned to them, although matter, the other half of the division, has completely changed its character.

*Bryson:* Yes! You'll even hear people talking about what is called psychosomatic medicine. They've suddenly discovered that there's a relation between a man's mind and what's going on in his body, as if that were a kind of bridge that had to be built between two things that heretofore had no contact with each other.

*Gross:* That's right!

*Bryson:* Now, what Locke tries to do is to give us a basis for determining what the mind can do.

*Bradley:* Yes! He tells us that the whole inception of this particular book grew out of the bull session that he and some of his scientific friends had about twenty years before he wrote the essay.

*Bryson:* He was a physician, wasn't he? And he did know most of what was known then about science.

*Gross:* And he knew everybody that was working. He knew Boyle; he knew Newton; he knew all the people who were really the great new discoverers in the field of science. But, in this bull session on medical questions and so on, he suddenly discovered that he and his friends didn't know whether they could solve the problems they were raising. In other words, were they going off into mystical or metaphysical questions without knowing what were the problems which the human mind could solve?

*Bryson:* In other words, his question was: is science an answer to a real problem?

*Gross:* Well, what is science and what isn't is what he's really after. So he decided that he was going to sit down and discover what the powers of the human mind were, and that is what this essay is supposed to tell us. I suppose you can say that this is the beginning of what we would call psychology, just for that reason.

*Bradley:* Of course, he called these all conjectures.

*Bryson:* Wasn't that just good manners, Mr. Bradley?

*Gross:* It was modesty, too. He's a modest man and very affable!

*Bryson:* But he thought these were the best answers that could then be got.

*Bradley:* Oh, I haven't any doubt of that.

*Bryson:* And he starts out with this rather unfortunate Latin tag, the *tabula rasa*.

*Bradley:* The mind is an unmarked white paper. . . .

*Bryson:* And experience marks upon it everything that the mind is ever going to have, as if the mind were just a piece of paper, and had no activity.

*Bradley:* That's what he says in Chapter One, but he denies it in Chapter Two, because he promptly goes to work and gives the mind lots of powers which, by his own theory, it can't have.

*Bryson:* Well, isn't that what he has to do all along? Doesn't he find himself, like most philosophers, up against a choice between being plausible and following his own logic?

*Gross:* Well, I think that when one describes Locke as "the

philosopher of common sense," that's exactly what one means. Locke, for example, comes up against the great problem that bothered the seventeenth century and all subsequent centuries: if, on the one hand, you have a mind which is not material in any way, and, on the other hand, you have matter which is not spiritual or mental in any way, how on earth can the two affect each other? What's the point of contact? Everybody's been bothered by that. But Locke simply refuses to discuss the problem. It is perfectly obvious that they do affect one another, so, since they do, Locke goes on to see what the effect is, but he won't tackle a real problem. Now, that's common sense, if you like. You know there must be a solution, so you let somebody else find it for you.

*Bradley*: So Locke creates his idea of ideas, which he oversimplifies at every point and that made a terrible problem—ideas being that which was written on the white paper of your mind—on which nothing was written when you were born.

*Bryson*: Experience writes the ideas?

*Bradley*: Experience writes ideas. Then you, an individual, take these ideas and you put them together, and you begin to think them through; then you get your perceptions, and out of your perceptions you build your comparisons; and out of your comparisons you build your theory of existence, until at last you've built yourself quite a pyramid out of a piece of white paper on which some impressions have been written.

*Bryson*: And you've got yourself a theory of personality, too—a kind of theory of what the individual is.

*Gross*: Yes, it's a curious picture. But may I add a footnote to what Mr. Bradley was saying? Locke does make one very significant shift. No longer does he assume that the mind has things as its objects of thought. Mind no longer knows things; it just knows ideas at this point. And that is going to turn out to be the trouble. This is going to land Locke in skepticism, which is quite untenable.

*Bryson*: Nevertheless, isn't it true that a good deal of modern skepticism does derive directly out of Locke, although he wouldn't have wanted it to?

*Gross*: Well, there is a chain of thought, and Locke is one of the main people in that chain. His "common sense" approach had great power for criticizing and great power for trying out stupid ideas. I think Locke's common sense has to be praised, but it had its own troubles.

*Bryson*: I interrupted you earlier.

*Gross*: Well, I was simply going to say that I think out of Locke's conception of the mind as a blank tablet, or whatever you want to call it, you get a conception of one separate individual. In other words, here is a mind that is born, so to speak; its own experience writes upon it; it has its own independence, its own integrity and when, later on, it enters into social or political or economic relations with other people, that provides some new experiences. But you start with the assumption in Locke of the individual as something created,

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independent, and then the individual goes on and enters into these various relationships.

*Bradley:* The individual is really shut off from everybody else, isn't he, basically?

*Gross:* He starts shut off, yes.

*Bradley:* He's in a dark room with a window. Through his senses he absorbs a little light through the window. Then he gets a little more light inside of himself through this window. But he is still inside that room.

*Bryson:* And he begins to see through this little window, Mr. Bradley, that there are other people looking at him through other little windows.

*Bradley:* That's right!

*Bryson:* And that's the way you get society.

*Bradley:* That's the way you get society. He decides then maybe he'll go outdoors and join with some of these people perhaps.

*Bryson:* That is not quite what our modern sociologists and anthropologists would think of as the nature of social relationships.

*Bradley:* No, our modern conceptions are reversed completely. You don't start with the individual. You achieve individuality by your whole process of experiences. But, I think the notion of the independent individual, which is an important part of Locke's whole theory of knowledge, is also the key to his political theory. You asked earlier if there were any connection between those two. I think this is it: the independent individual grows up, weighs his ideas, has his freedom and his liberty to a certain extent; then he enters into certain social connections with other people if he so chooses.

*Bryson:* Being a man of enlightenment, Locke also took up a great many questions of moral significance. He didn't content himself merely with psychological or epistemological analysis. He tried to solve the great problems that people of that time wanted to know about. He had ideas about how to prove the existence of God, for instance.

*Bradley:* Yes, he did. As a matter of fact, he accepted rather naively, it seems, the whole conception of God which had come down from the metaphysicians whom he was trying to attack. Without raising the questions at all, which they thought properly raised, he moves on, on the basis of the assumption that God is demonstrable, that God has created the world, that God has made man what he is, and that God has made this tablet upon which things can be written, and the world that does the writing. Then, on the basis of this theological assumption, which he doesn't make any effort to elaborate or elucidate, he moves on like a little boy in the backyard who plays happily as long as he's playing in the backyard, but he never gets outside the backyard.

*Gross:* Although he spends a great deal of time discussing God and the proofs of the existence of God, and although he is probably a very religious man, nevertheless, the picture of the universe on which he's operating is one which has nothing, let's say, but an initial need for God. God has created such a perfect machine in the physical uni-



verse that it would be most unmechanical of Him to interfere with its operations.

*Bryson*: This was the popular theory of the time.

*Gross*: Yes. And God goes through the moral order in the same way. I think Locke has no real, fundamental policies about morality. There is right, and there is wrong; and they're all part of the moral order of the universe which God has created.

*Bryson*: And everybody knows them, Mr. Gross?

*Gross*: Well, there are some wrong-headed people of course. I love Locke's statement that there is a degree of madness in all men. You can be stubborn and wilful and get out of line, but it's all there. It's all perfectly simple if you're going to be full of common sense.

*Bryson*: And these moral rules are rules that apply everywhere and at all times? They are universal? Or doesn't that problem really arise?

*Gross*: Oh, Locke is magnificent when he starts talking about the Americans, for example. The Americans, you discover in the footnotes, mean the American Indians. They have certain strange habits, but even they seem to have some indication of the fundamental moral order, although they work it out in slightly different ways.

*Bryson*: Well, Locke has supposed that, if you could have brought an American Indian to London in his day and sat down with him and found a language you could talk, by reason and mere argument, the American Indian could be brought around to accept the same general ideas of God and morality held by an English gentleman of enlightenment.

*Gross*: Well, I hate to be dogmatic. I think he certainly would have thought so, yes.

*Bryson*: And he didn't see any problem, really, in the fact that the Indian had come out of completely different experience.

*Gross*: Well, he probably would assume that the Indian would adjust himself immediately to the British society into which he had been introduced.

*Bradley*: He might be wrong-headed, of course.

*Bryson*: But that would be an individual matter. That would not be because he is an Indian?

*Bradley*: Yes! And education is not very important in such a matter! In other words, education really isn't a barrier. You can break through all that and teach a man what is common sense.

*Bryson*: And he thinks if you have a conviction that a thing is right, you'll do it without any trouble.

*Gross*: I think so, Mr. Bryson. Locke has the general theory that people are created with good sense. That's the general assumption of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that people have got good sense, and that they don't radically differ.

*Bradley*: Unless they happen to have some of this madness that he talks about.

*Gross*: Yes, but that's probably a good thing, too, and Locke never implies that it isn't.

*Bryson*: It was several hundred years later that men began to

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dig into their own minds and find out that perhaps they weren't quite as sunny and reasonable as they appeared.

**Bradley:** They began to discover that there were great forces, almost demonic forces, in the unconscious, which create some of this madness, this inability on the part of man to think rationally about himself, or about his morality or about God.

**Gross:** And you can't reconcile that with this blank tablet, this *tabula rasa* of Locke's.

**Bryson:** You mean, Mr. Gross, that the *tabula rasa* theory would have made Freud and much of modern dream psychology impossible?

**Gross:** I don't think Locke had any conception of that. If you take the divorce of mind and matter, as Locke did, and if you assume that the mind is a complete blank when it starts life, then you can really trace all this experience. It all comes from outside except for the operations which it observes itself going through. Locke has the theory that when you're unconscious you're really unconscious; there is nothing going on; the mind is not functioning.

**Bradley:** And when you're asleep your idea of duration is entirely gone. There's no such thing as time for you when you're asleep.

**Gross:** He says that thinking and having ideas is an operation of the mind, and that the mind can cease operation if it wants to.

**Bryson:** Well, this quiet, sunny, common-sense world, in which he lived and in which he evidently believes all men could live if they just were sensible enough, has an ideal, however. It had an ideal which he called happiness. That's what men sought. Locke was responsible for the phrase "life, liberty, and property," but he also was responsible for the phrase, "pursuit of happiness," at another point.

**Gross:** He goes so far as to say that the highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit, and this is a nice phrase, "pursuit of true and solid happiness."

**Bryson:** How would he have defined "true happiness"?

**Gross:** Apparently you can distinguish between true happiness and false happiness and any sensible man can. You don't get giddy about things, and you don't follow up faulty and uncertain desires. You're true and solid. I think those two words mean the same thing.

**Bryson:** They're very English, aren't they?

**Gross:** Locke himself probably thought that he enjoyed true and solid happiness and he was constantly pursuing it. He was also always trying to satisfy his real desires, the true desires, again as distinguished from the desires for evil things, and I think he thought that he was on the right track. But it's interesting to note that it is the *pursuit* of happiness that he says is the endeavor of the mind, not happiness itself.

**Bradley:** That's where the psychological aspect of desire comes in. Locke seems to subsume desire and happiness under the same category. So happiness and desire are the same thing. When you pursue what you want and get what you want, you're happy.

**Gross:** That's right!

**Bryson:** Yes, and if you're a good man you're also moral, A

good man wants to be happy in morality. So, if you don't want to be happy with things that are morally right, then you're really not a good man, and your happiness is an illusion.

*Bradley*: And in order to be moral you must be prudent. So the prudent man is the man who in the long run is the happy man.

*Bryson*: Well, we started out by saying that the world described in this book was breaking up. What's breaking it up? This is the old, common-sense, nice world. What is breaking it up?

*Gross*: All kinds of factors have been at work on it. The philosophy itself broke down at once. Locke's own immediate followers pointed out how brilliantly inconsistent he was, although I don't think that would have bothered him a bit.

*Bryson*: But the fact that his philosophy was inconsistent hasn't bothered us for more than two hundred years, Mr. Gross. We still consider it a kind of common-sense foundation for our living.

*Gross*: Oh, I agree. I don't think we should be put off by the inconsistency. Locke may have had the right ideas and arrived at them in the wrong way. I think we have the same kind of common sense that he had and some of these same basic notions.

*Bradley*: We have all incorporated a great many of these inconsistencies into our way of life.

*Bryson*: But now we're beginning to question it all. What makes this question? Certainly not philosophic argument.

*Gross*: Certain basic things. For instance, there's the whole conception of the mind and of mental illness and how it occurs. The fact that you can't cure mental diseases by this assumption of the *tabula rasa* and a perfectly straight experience has forced us on one point to challenge Locke. I think the whole conception of society and of our interdependence one upon another is a repudiation of Locke's basic theory of initial—or, let's say—heaven-given individuality. We now figure we can't solve our social ills by that kind of assumption.

*Bradley*: We're coming to realize, as Locke seems not to have realized, the importance of the emotions in thought, in social relations, in our interrelation with ourselves.

*Bryson*: Perhaps Locke thought that the incurability of the emotions could be reasoned out of man, Mr. Bradley.

*Bradley*: They *could* be reasoned out of man. But Locke's superficial conception of emotions, his definition of joy and happiness and love, for instance, seem entirely inadequate. He doesn't get hold of the great dynamic and demonic forces that lie in man, in his unconscious. In fact, of course, he knows nothing of the unconscious. He knows nothing of the meaning of dreams. When you're asleep, you're asleep. He doesn't realize that when you're asleep you're awake also, and that you're thinking hard.

*Gross*: I don't know whether Mr. Bradley will agree with me, but I've always felt that the other philosopher, who was born in the same year that Locke was, got an awful lot nearer to the true explanation, and that's Spinoza.

*Bradley*: Yes, indeed!

*Gross*: I think he's much more on the track, so we can't just

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simply say it's time that was arguing against Locke and that is why he didn't get down to the bottom of the problem.

*Bryson*: That's right! But he was, as we said in the beginning, the spokesman for a group of people, and he was spokesman for a period. He wasn't merely the product of it. He was also an active spokesman for it. He was trying to justify a certain era of goodwill and common sense and quiet, wasn't he?

*Gross*: He's a very important spokesman for a very important stage in human development. Just as we had to have Newton before we could get out of contemporary physics, so we had to have this political development before we could improve the lot of mankind any more. But we've got to keep going. We can't rest. It is curious that, although we've rejected the Newtonian physics as the final explanation long since, we still keep a great many of Locke's presuppositions as if they were a different kind of truth that couldn't be challenged.

*Bradley*: Yes, that's true, but more and more men have abandoned his theological presuppositions which seemed to give free rein to all these sprites that he let out of the Pandora's box, and seemed to give them carte blanche to go wherever they pleased and to reduce the world to a kind of a wilderness, from which nobody seems to be able to rescue himself—because he doesn't know how to get to his fellow-man as he follows this point of view, which Locke derived from the false premise of the *tabula rasa*.

*Bryson*: Of course, you realize, gentlemen, that there's one question which this leaves hanging, and which requires a good deal of thought and discussion on some other occasion, and that is this: if we have now decided to abandon Locke's psychology and Locke's analysis of the mind as insufficient, do we also abandon the Declaration of Independence and Locke's politics?

# JAMES

## Pragmatism

MASON GROSS

• MAX LERNER

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* There are a great many persons, especially in Europe, who think of pragmatism as the only real American school of philosophy. They associate with it certain things they don't like very much about Americans, such as a pushing practicality and a cash criterion for everything of value in this world. As a matter of fact, James was about as typically American in his virtues and his faults as anybody could be, and in publishing this book in 1907, he was marking a certain turn in the philosophic thought of the world.

*Gross:* You're right, Mr. Bryson. The attack which James includes in his book on all the older European modes of thinking is really a breath of fresh air, which characterized America at that particular stage in its development. Pragmatism, both in James and Dewey, is a polemical attack. These men are trying to get rid of all the idealism and "system-making" philosophies of the Germans.

*Bryson:* Idealism, of course, in the German sense.

*Gross:* Yes, the sense in which a philosopher like Hegel or Fichte or Kant would try to work out an explanation for the world by drawing deductions from a few very simple principles. You think these principles up with your mind; you go ahead and draw your deductions; and you have the truth.

*Bryson:* And everything in the world has to illustrate those principles.

*Gross:* Oh, yes, you can work with some of the facts when they do fit in, and if they don't, . . . well, that's some kind of an illusion. James attacks that approach vigorously, insisting upon paying attention to the facts as they are to be found.

*Lerner:* I love James' series of phrases, when he points to the distinction between the "tender-minded" and the "tough-minded." He felt that the rationalists were tender-minded, that they developed concepts inside of their own minds and didn't think of the world of reality. And he thought of himself, and especially of the scientists

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of America for whom, by the way, he was speaking, as being tough-minded. What he was expressing, I suppose, was the new and growing science of America with its very factual sense of what the universe was like. And, I suppose, secondly he was expressing the revolt of America from its colonialism, from the whole of Europe, and the revolt especially of American business enterprise, the men of commerce, the men of business, the men of practical sense, who didn't find much meaning in the kind of philosophy that had been brought over to America from Europe.

*Bryson*: You know, Mr. Lerner, there seems to me to be a kind of paradox—as there is in most philosophic positions—when you say that James, speaking for science, wanted to bring things back to the facts, because, actually, his theory of what was a fact was a relativistic and fairly precarious thing. A fact was something that seemed to you to work for the moment.

*Lerner*: I think, Mr. Bryson, that James is perfectly clear on that point. Somewhere in one of his letters to Henry James he said of his book, *Psychology*, that he had to forge every sentence in the teeth of the stubborn facts. He means that you can't play around with your subject matter.

*Gross*: Yes!

*Bryson*: You can't play around with fact! And yet the fact is not an absolute thing in an external world, which, once discovered, lasts forever.

*Lerner*: Well, no . . . not absolutely interpreted and absolutely definite. But, on the other hand, a fact certainly is not something that's woven out of the mind—which is what the German philosophers would have you believe.

*Bryson*: And in throwing that idea out he is turning to the world of experience, the world of immediate experience.

*Lerner*: A stubborn world of experience. It's a world that you cannot play with.

*Bryson*: And upon that he passes what has seemed to many a kind of irreverent and indecorous judgment for a philosopher to pass—that thoughts must have a cash value.

*Lerner*: And that is the phrase that is, I think, unfortunate. I'm sorry James used it. It may have been very potent at the time in getting his point across, but it has caused a great deal of misunderstanding of James, because it always suggests that one look for the altogether to immediate consequences of any idea or any proposition. I don't believe that James is that naive. Later on, in this book, *Pragmatism*, for example, he talks about testing the value of the great scientific systems. Now, they've got to pay off. They have got to contribute something very definite to your understanding of, and your control over, nature. If you have a scientific problem, let's say, in which there are two theories, and there is no possible way of deciding which theory is true . . . well, throw them out the window. They are no good to anybody. That's really what James is trying to say, I think.

*Gross*: Yes! Before I defend James on this—and I want to—

I want to spell out the indictment a bit further. In reading this book today you're somewhat dismayed, not just by one cropping-up of the phrase "cash value," but by a whole galaxy of phrases like this: "Cash," "pay-off," "profit," "prosper," "prosperous." Now, in defending this, or perhaps in explaining it, it's interesting to note how appropriate the audience was to which he was delivering these lectures—because this book, incidentally, is a series of lectures and it's published in the same form as it was delivered.

*Bryson*: And it was not delivered to a philosophic conference.

*Gross*: No! These were the Lowell Institute lectures, delivered to a group of Bostonians, some of them from Harvard and other educational institutions, and, I suppose, many of them from State Street, from Boston commerce, finance and business. And there's something appropriate about this, because William James had a horror of the closeted philosophers who had removed themselves from the world of sweat and agony and toil and push and tension that he knew about. He wanted somehow to organize in philosophic terms and communicate the meaning of this kind of world. So, I think that when he uses language like this it's possible that half consciously, he is trying to communicate to the new ruling class of America—and to an extent, of the world—the meaning of the whole philosophic tradition in a way in which they can use it.

*Lerner*: I think that is true. Of course, he is arguing all the time, I think, consciously or unconsciously, against his very distinguished colleague, Josiah Royce. Royce was definitely in the tradition of German idealism. They would argue about such things as: Is the world really one or is the world really many? And James just says: All right, tell me what difference it would conceivably make how we answer that question and then we'll decide if that idea does have some value—cash value, if you like. But he would insist upon bringing it to that particular touchstone, otherwise, he would not enter that type of metaphysical dispute at all.

*Bryson*: But it has led, hasn't it, Mr. Gross, to these profound misconceptions of what James was after? It's given people the idea that pragmatism is a philosophy of mere practicality, and whatever works now is all right—and it doesn't matter whether it works tomorrow or not. That's not what he meant.

*Gross*: No, that's not what he meant. James' attitude has also given rise to the criticism that this book isn't philosophy, it's psychology. It's just an account of how one particular human mind might go through its detailed operations, but it really doesn't get down to the fundamental questions of the universe. On all those points James is much more clear than you'd gather from this book, because this book is polemical. Here he is stressing the cash-value side all the way along, though I think he realizes the full implications of his position.

*Bryson*: But, was he not only trying to explain what he thought to a group of intelligent laymen, who lived in a time of great business activity? Was he not also, in a sense, a spokesman for these people? That's what the Europeans have accused him of being. Just

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as Locke, whom we've discussed before, was labeled a spokesman for the great bloodless revolution of the seventeenth century, so they speak of James as if he were a spokesman for American capitalism.

*Gross:* I don't think that makes much sense. I wouldn't emphasize even the capitalistic side of it. It seems to me that James is trying to be a kind of an intellectual engineer here. He is trying to tell you how to solve a problem. Instead of just contemplating it, looking at it, and saying how beautiful it is, he says, let's figure out some way of deciding this issue, and if we can't decide the issue let's throw it away and get some that we can decide.

*Lerner:* Suppose that, instead of using the word "capitalism," we use a word to describe the broader world of which capitalism is part—the world of American technical, scientific, practical achievement, the world of American action and of activism, the world of American process? One of the things that strikes me is the extent to which, for James, the universe is an unfinished universe; it's something that's always in process. It would be interesting for students sometimes to make a study of the language in this book just in terms of how much of the language suggests the idea of change, process, and dynamism, rather than anything static.

*Bryson:* Well, basically in these terms and to this audience and to his own time, he was trying to explain what was, after all, a philosophy, wasn't it? It wasn't mere engineering that he was talking about. He thought that this had definite implications as to the nature of the universe and the nature of truth. In fact, he described it, didn't he, as being a method and a theory. Well, what was the method?

*Gross:* The method, of course, is that of testing any idea, and devising some practical means of deciding how you are going to solve some particular problem or test the truth of any proposition. James really feels that we can move very fast here. It's an exciting world that we live in; there are all kinds of new things that we can discover; and we shouldn't be bothering with these trivial problems. But what he is really trying to do is to take people who have already got the practical attitude and make them over into philosophers by showing that the great philosophical and religious problems can be dealt with in the same way.

*Lerner:* Could I add, Mr. Gross, that perhaps he is also taking people who have a practical attitude and telling them in effect not to worry too much about their practical attitude—that that in a way makes them philosophers?

*Bryson:* Well, if that's his logic, what kind of truth do you get by testing it that way? If you contrast it with a much older theory of Descartes, for instance, which went: if I can see the thing very clearly then I'm sure it must be true, James appears to say: if I can make it work it must be true. Now, what does that do to truth?

*Lerner:* Well, take the old theory of truth, which James, I suppose, was considering most of the time—the theory that an idea is true if it corresponds to, or is a copy of, an independently existing reality.

*Bryson:* Which is only ascertainable through ideas, of course.



*Gross*: Well, that's what you always get into. That is what Mr. Ralph Barton Perry called the "egocentric predicament." You can never get outside of your ideas to compare them. Nevertheless, there was the theory that an idea was true if it copied some kind of preexisting reality. Now, you get into all your difficulties right there, because you can't get out of your ideas, and anyhow, what would a copy be, and how can an idea be a copy of something else? You can go on with all these epistemological and philosophical problems *ad nauseam*.

*Bryson*: The old "small change" of philosophy, Mr. Gross?

*Gross*: The small change, since we are seeing James in financial terms. James said why fiddle around with the epistemological approach; let's see if the idea makes any positive difference! In other words, if you had a conception of free will, the dignity of man, or whatever else it might be, instead of arguing as to whether there was some kind of epistemological justification, James wanted to see what difference it makes. If you assume that you do have a free will, you do have decisions to make, and they're yours, then presumably one kind of behavior results. If, on the other hand, you think you're constrained by a deterministic nature and have no free will, another kind of attitude results.

*Bryson*: So your logic is to see what works, and the true thing is the thing that does work.

*Gross*: Yes!

*Bryson*: Doesn't that seem a little harsh?

*Lerner*: Well, Mr. Bryson, no! The logic, if I may restate it, or the method—pragmatism is a method—is to take any competing ideas or versions of truth and ask a very direct question about them: what difference does it make which of these we believe? In other words, what are the consequences of ideas? Ideas do have consequences. Ideas, therefore, are instruments for something. They are instruments for illumination, and instruments for action.

*Bryson*: Well, where do you come out with truth—which is the philosopher's problem, Mr. Lerner?

*Lerner*: Well, truth at that point becomes one, which, given the whole world of other competing truths, is one that is most conformable with all the rest and with your own particular temperament.

*Gross*: It's also important to say that James believed that truth was a form of value, and that you have to take the truth of an idea and harmonize with all the other values that you might have. It's a value judgment, and not simply a matter of logic.

*Lerner*: One of the things I like about him, Mr. Gross, is that he doesn't forget that the philosopher, or the thinker, or the searcher-after-truth doesn't cease to be a person. He is still a person with preferences, with a history, with a biography, with a temperament.

*Bryson*: Your word "temperament," Mr. Lerner—you used it twice—seems to me a very important word. Where does James get his temperament? He's a creation of something. What made this man who was so exciting and lovable to those people that came in

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contact with him, who wrote so brilliantly, who at a late age really—he was something like sixty-four when he published this book—become not a psychologist, not a physician, not a scientist, so much as suddenly a philosopher?

*Lerner:* For one thing, Mr. Bryson, he started well. He came of a very interesting family. I remember we once discussed on this program John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*, and at that time we talked of the way in which Mill was the product of an educational theory of his father's. In the same way both Willam James and his brother, the great novelist, Henry James, were the products of an educational theory of their father, Henry James, Sr., who was an erratic, perhaps cantankerous, but extremely original man, and one who had some very interesting notions about how you brought up boys. He lugged them around with him all over Europe, everywhere. He didn't give them any formal schooling. He subjected them to a whole variety of books and ideas, and I must say, looking at the product, if you're going to test the validity of this educational theory in James' terms by the consequences, the consequences were pretty good.

*Bryson:* He didn't seek any unity of experience, did he, for his children?

*Gross:* Not at the moment—no. It's very interesting, though, to note that you're talking about his temperament. He calls himself "tough-minded." He is one of the tough-minded ones who is going to be empiricistic and go by the facts. But, list some of the other qualities. The tough-minded man should be materialistic; but James is not, in his own sense. He should be pessimistic; but James, it seems to me, is an incurable optimist.

*Gross:* He should be irreligious; James is anything but irreligious. He recognizes the contrast. He doesn't think there is any absolute difference between the fundamentally different types of temperament. But he was a fascinating person in his own temperament, and he changed, it seems to me, from one position to another.

*Bryson:* How much of a scientist was he? Both of you have spoken of him as in some ways a spokesman for the scientific mood and drift of his day. He certainly wrote a book on psychology, which was great for its time and is a great work of literature. And he was a physician. Was he a scientist, actually?

*Gross:* Well, you always have to ask whether the particular type of scientist that you're concerned with most determines your way of thinking. He certainly wasn't a scientist, I would say, in which the physicist of his period would find a kindred spirit. He's not that type of scientist at all.

*Bryson:* Nor is his science biological. There's always a difference between the man who approaches science from the biological side and those who approach it from the physical side.

*Lerner:* What I miss most in James, Mr. Bryson, is something we mentioned a while ago. We talked of pessimism. It's partly the absence of pessimism, but I'd like to put it differently. I miss a tragic strain. It's the same thing we miss in John Stuart Mill. There is this

sense of his that you have to have some consolation from your ideas—which represented his whole approach to religion, and which made him think of religion in pluralistic terms: that there may be a variety of religious views that give you consolation. This whole approach of his is as if the human being needed somehow to be propped up. There is an underlying sense, of course, that there is something that he had to be propped up against, a kind of chaos and vacuum in life, but there is never explicitly a facing of the tragic facts of life.

*Bryson*: He thought if you could organize life and master it in the material sense that you mastered it spiritually, too.

*Gross*: Yes, which I think is very fallacious—very fallacious.

*Bryson*: Did he really believe that, or was he just singing to himself?

*Lerner*: I think that is a good way of explaining what has always struck me as a kind of immaturity in his book. He does seem to be a person for whom things have been fortunate and good. Of course, it isn't actually completely true, nevertheless, his optimism, this gay hopping from point to point, is sometimes disturbing.

*Gross*: It wasn't always true that he had been fortunate.

*Lerner*: No!

*Gross*: He went in his young manhood through very dark periods. I suppose he had a bad breakdown.

*Lerner*: Yes. He had a nervous breakdown of great severity, and it may be that his method for preventing himself from ever slipping back was to keep in the forefront of his mind always promise, progress, optimism. The number of times he uses the phrase "promise," or the "promise of American life," is partly an outgrowth of this basic viewpoint of James'. And one of the things that's worth noting is that, while he does express the capitalist outlook in the way in which we've talked about it, he is also the forerunner of much of today's liberal thought in America.

*Bryson*: Ah, yes, Mr. Lerner, that's right! But he's also accused of being the forerunner of philosophical support for authoritarianism, Fascism, Communism, and so on. What do we do with that curious paradox?

*Gross*: May I ask a question here, Mr. Bryson. I'd like to see what Mr. Lerner would say about it. The main charge, it seems to me, that the philosophers made against James is that he is fundamentally anti-intellectualistic. In other words, he distrusts profoundly the workings of the intellect. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why anti-intellectualism movements such as Fascism and so on have been traced back to James. In the last analysis there are no real roots to this thing at all.

*Bryson*: That's the linkage that those people give who accuse James of having fathered totalitarianism.

*Gross*: I'm very skeptical of that. There's another linkage, and that is that, since he says that truth is that which works, this may lead you to a cult of action and to a cult of anything that works

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by any means, which, of course, was true of the Fascist philosophy and certainly in many ways true of the Communist philosophy.

*Bryson:* But you don't believe that a world in which values are plural leads to a world in which somebody has a right by violence to impose one value?

*Gross:* Well, of course, that's the greatest gulf between James and any form of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is monistic; he was a pluralist. Totalitarianism was dogmatic; he was essentially tolerant, and he was hospitable to all kinds of conflicting viewpoints.

*Lerner:* Well, he really believed in the individual as being free and independent. In other words, any attempt to clamp down on the individual and force him to conform to any kind of pattern whatsoever was completely repugnant to James.

*Bryson:* But he did believe, didn't he, that individual differences had value, that diversity was creative in itself, and that only in the clash and combination of different temperaments and different experience could you get any kind of society that was worth having? He believed that thoroughly.

*Lerner:* Very definitely! All these forms of totalitarianism he would have considered under this rationalism—in other words, as a whole scheme of ideas which is thought of by some people and then imposed on all the rest and not subject to any criticism by the facts or changed in accordance with the stream of events. Whether James could have justified his opposition or not on intellectual grounds is one point; but, temperamentally and personally, he would have been radically opposed to any form of totalitarianism.

*Bryson:* But there again you get this idea that truth is somewhat a product of temperament. He was by temperament a free man, and his values were free.

*Gross:* He was a free man who believed in an open universe and an open society and one of the interesting things is that there are consequences to ideas and that, if, to any extent, you may say that we have inherited the tradition of James, that John Dewey, let's say, today carries it on, then I would say that the things that we have largely inherited is the open society that flowed from William James' open mind.

*Bryson:* So, basically, at least in personality, he is an American philosopher that we can be proud of and confident in.

# SOPHOCLES

## *Antigone*

DIMITRI MITROPOULOS • MARGARET WEBSTER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* The *Antigone* is one of those great books that seem to state a theme, or a thesis of conflict, which is just as real in modern life as it was in ancient life. I suppose that accounts for the fact that people are still writing Antigones. It's a theme of profound difficulty. How can one state it? How does Sophocles state it?

*Webster:* I think Sophocles states it, Mr. Bryson, in two excerpts, one from some lines of *Antigone* and one from some lines of *Creon*. In the first one, *Creon* has spoken to *Antigone*, who has just been arrested and asked her whether she knew that an edict had forbidden her to do what she has done. She says, "I knew it: could I help it? It was public." And he says, "And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law?" And then she replies: "Yes; for it was not *Zeus* that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth." Later in the argument, *Creon* states his side of the case, in which he points out that he is the ruler of the city. He says ". . . if anyone transgresses, and does violence to the laws, or thinks to dictate to his rulers, such an one can win no praise from me. No, whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in just things and unjust. . . . But disobedience is the worst of evils. This it is that ruins cities; this makes homes desolate. . . . Therefore we must support the cause of order . . ." In those words, Sophocles states the two sides of his conflict.

*Bryson:* It is a conflict, then, isn't it, Miss Webster—to put it a little more roughly than Sophocles did—between conscience and law. The part of the old Greek legend that Sophocles used here, as all Greek dramatists used the ancient legends, was the story of *Anti-*

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gone, the daughter of the tragic marriage of Oedipus, whose own life had been affected so deeply by her experience of tragedy in her early years and by the fact that her brothers had quarreled and fought, who now insisted upon burying Polyneices, one of her brothers, in spite of the fact that he was a traitor to Thebes, and a law had been passed that, since he was a traitor, he should not be buried.

*Mitropoulos*: Yes. That's one thing one can say! The Thebans, even before Creon, had such horrible habits, such barbarian habits, they refused to bury the dead of their enemies.

*Bryson*: And Polyneices, then, Mr. Mitropoulos, became an enemy. Although he was a relative of Creon and brother of Antigone, he became an enemy because he had attacked the Theban state.

*Mitrop*: Yes, certainly. He was a traitor. Besides that, he killed his brother.

*Bryson*: He killed his own brother—who was loyal to the state and loyal to Creon as the ruler of the state.

*Mitrop*: And fate made it that they both died.

*Bryson*: They died by each other's hand. But Antigone says in effect, in these lines of Sophocles, the fact that he was my brother overrides the fact that he was a traitor.

*Webster*: More than that, I think. She feels, it seems to me—and this is a feeling that must have been echoed by mankind through all ages—that you cannot pursue vengeance against the dead, that it is the sacred duty of mankind to give respect and burial to the dead, and that this has been the custom of all civilized mankind. This secondary issue is in a way a symbol of the greater issue, which is stated in those lines that I've just read.

*Bryson*: And Creon, who was her uncle and the father of the man whom she expected to marry, says she shall die because she broke the law—in spite of her conscience. Her conscience is no mitigation of the fact she broke the law. That's still the real issue, isn't it?

*Webster*: It certainly is. The interest of *Antigone* as a drama, and that which gives it pertinence still, and has always aroused people passionately in favor of one character or the other, is that this is not a clear-cut case. Antigone is simply obeying the behest of conscience, and—though in modern usage this has grown to be rather a little word—her sense of God. And against her are stacked not merely a tyrant, or a dictator—Creon has strong aspects of that in him—but also the law and custom of the state in which she lives.

*Mitrop*: And one must not forget also that Creon, when he made that terrible decision to give death to anybody who would not obey his rule, didn't know that somebody from his own family, Antigone, would do a thing like that. He is very embarrassed, in fact, when he finds out that she did it. Naturally, he doesn't want to give in to that, because, as a tyrant, he thinks that he must keep to his word.

*Bryson*: Well now, Mr. Mitropoulos, this ancient compatriot of yours, Creon, whom you must have known much longer and much more intimately than we can, since we aren't Greeks—

*Mitrop*: Exactly!

*Bryson*: Well, you studied him as a boy.

*Webster*: And you speak his language.

*Bryson*: You said of this man, "because he was a tyrant." Well, suppose he weren't a tyrant? Suppose he were, what he actually was also, an entirely legitimate ruler? Can a legitimate ruler permit a member of his family to break a law because that person is related to him? It's not only the tyrant; it's any governor. After all, Creon has a problem, too.

*Webster*: In the translated words of Sophocles, Creon says, "I will not make myself a liar to my people. I must carry out my edicts." In other words, he must do this no matter who it is. And it seems to me that the generality of readers and audiences will agree with Creon in that part of the issue. The one which has raised so much disagreement—and I'd be interested in knowing how you gentlemen feel about it—is whether Antigone was right to feel that her sense of God superseded the law, or whether Creon was right in sticking to the law, no matter what.

*Mitrop*: She's naturally on a higher plane there, and she stays much higher than Creon, because she thinks that the first justice is the law of the gods, and the law of the human being and the ruler is not more important than the law of gods. The only thing on his side is that this law of leaving the dead unburied was already the custom of the Thebans, as I told you. Naturally, as soon as he became a ruler of Thebes he thought that he had to respect the customs, and that he would please his own people if he gives the order to punish anybody who buries the enemy of the state.

*Bryson*: You're giving a very good argument for Creon, Mr. Mitropoulos, because he's following the custom. What Antigone really does here—if I can be anti-Antigone for a moment, is to say she knows better than the state. And besides, there's another element in Creon's argument: that is, he can't be overruled, particularly by a woman. Which gives a slightly ungracious tone to his logic.

*Webster*: Now, you can't expect me to sympathize with that argument, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: No, nor do I. I think he shouldn't have said that. He would have had a stronger case if he hadn't kept saying, "Well, of all people to overrule me—a woman!" But, it seems to me Mr. Mitropoulos is putting some good arguments in here for Creon, when he says that it was the custom as the head of the state understood it. Antigone is not only putting her conscience above the law, she's also putting her interpretation of the ritual and the religious aspect of the matter, her interpretation, her direct and private message from God, Miss Webster, above the official interpretation.

*Webster*: Yes, and I think, if I may say so, that it's part of Sophocles' genius that he gives Creon all the arguments. Creon has an even further one in saying that, if every individual is at liberty to put his sense of justice and his sense of right and his conscience above the law, that is anarchy, and nothing else.

*Mitrop*: I can add something here. You know that all the rest of

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Greece was horrified about the awful custom of the Thebans. So that we can say the same thing about the other Greeks.

*Webster:* If Creon has Thebes on his side, Antigone has the rest of Greece on hers?

*Mitrop:* Certainly.

*Bryson:* When this was played before an Athenian audience many hundreds of years ago, Mr. Mitropoulos, do you think the audience probably sided with Antigone, because the Theban custom was wrong?

*Mitrop:* Certainly, you know that even Theseus, later on, made war on Thebes because they didn't bury their dead.

*Webster:* But don't you think that it's part of Sophocles' genius as a dramatist that he does give Creon all the arguments? And yet he knows perfectly well that the whole world, for all time, is going to root for Antigone.

*Bryson:* I'm not sure they all do, Miss Webster. That, I should want to take up as a matter of fact. I know quite a lot of people who have been deeply interested in the problem presented by this play, and have been fascinated still more by the complexity and reality and naturalism of the characters, and by Sophocles' greatness as a dramatist, but they're not quite sure that Antigone just didn't set out to be a martyr, that she would have been a martyr, somehow, no matter what happened. She was a stubborn, rigidly self-righteous woman—I'm interpreting now.

*Webster:* This is the anti-Antigone view.

*Bryson:* That's right—the anti-Antigone view. And she just made them kill her. She *had* to be martyred. What do you think about that?

*Webster:* Well, I do think that the arguments are extraordinarily brilliantly balanced. And I'd like Mr. Mitropoulos, who's known Sophocles longer than we have, to tell us how it feels from his point of view. For instance, in modern Greece how is this play accepted, Mr. Mitropoulos—as an ancient drama that you have to study, or as a modern problem of immediate pertinence?

*Mitrop:* My goodness, I couldn't say that in the schools we really—when we learn those things—appreciate them.

*Bryson:* You studied it as a boy?

*Mitrop:* Yes, I did study it.

*Bryson:* Did it mean anything to you, Mr. Mitropoulos?

*Mitrop:* Not in that time! Our professor of Ancient Greek was much more concerned with the syntaxes and the verbs and all those things, which were very boring, very boring. I can tell you something that I'm ashamed of, but, when I was in the class I was so bored with all those details and the fact that they never tried to explain the poet and the meaning of the drama.

*Webster:* Just like we teach Shakespeare?

*Mitrop:* Yes. And, since I was at that time very interested in music, I finally decided to bring my exercise of harmony to the class. And I was doing my harmony exercises in class when in silence the professor came to my place and saw me writing music, and he threw



me out of the class. So, for me, *Antigone* has really quite a different memory. I feel ashamed that, in that time, I didn't appreciate it. But, later on, when I really read the drama myself, then I understood all the wonderful poetry.

*Bryson*: Well now, would you say in answer to Miss Webster's question, Mr. Mitropoulos, that, after you came to this maturely and got its poetry and its power of analysis of character, you felt that *Antigone* was a sympathetic character? Or did you feel that perhaps she was a little too self-righteous?

*Mitrop*: I think she's very inconsistent. She and Creon, too.

*Bryson*: Well, people are inconsistent.

*Mitrop*: Yes, real people are. And that's the main thing. I think Sophocles wanted to make his characters so strong, so inconsistent, and so real, so that he could have more conflict. For instance, *Antigone* appears at first as a very proud woman and, as such, she's sympathetic. Then, at the end, when she's going to die, she's just crying; she has a self-pity that is very inconsistent. Still, it's wonderful.

*Webster*: Oh no! I have to contradict you on that. I don't think she's inconsistent at all. I don't think she's as proud as you say, at the beginning, and at the end I wouldn't use the word "self-pity," though I know what you mean. I think that Sophocles' great penetration of imagination leads him to place himself in the position of that girl who is going to her death, and he knows that she has, to use the English phrase, "bought it," that there is no escape for her, and that there seems to be no living creature in the world on her side. I don't think that her emotional reaction to that situation can be belittled by being called self-pity.

*Bryson*: Well, there's also the fact that this is a tragedy complete, because Creon also ends in complete disaster.

*Mitrop*: Yes. That's why I call them inconsistent on the one side, but very human on the other side. You're absolutely right.

*Bryson*: Is that, Mr. Mitropoulos, because Sophocles, as distinguished possibly from his great compeers, Euripides and Aeschylus, cared more for making this a great drama than he did for making it a great fable? That is, he wasn't so interested in having characters represent moral principles and come into conflict as abstract principles; he cared more about having them real people.

*Mitrop*: Yes, exactly! He created such conflicts on purpose. He created such clashes, dramatic clashes for the theatrical effect. He was mainly a dramatist.

*Bryson*: And what about that? What about the style in the old Greek, Mr. Mitropoulos?

*Mitrop*: That is one of his main strengths, the poetry. The drama, the clash of the drama and religion comes later.

*Webster*: We lose an enormous amount, of course, by not being able to get the impact of his poetry. Would you say, in your judgment, Mr. Mitropoulos, that his poetic writing and drama was superior to that of Euripides, or Aeschylus?

*Mitrop*: No, one couldn't say that. It was different. But one

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thing is evident, that the choruses in all the tragedies of Sophocles are not so much involved in the drama—they're almost detached—and, therefore, it gives them an opportunity to make just absolutely abstract poetry.

*Webster:* Like songs.

*Mitrop:* Exactly! Like this wonderful thing that comes after the son of Creon goes completely to despair and threatens that he's going to commit suicide. The chorus comes along to join the next scene, the arrival of Antigone, and it starts with the wonderful, the famous line which means in English, "Eros, Love, invincible in fight." This is one of the most beautiful, most legendary poetries in the Ancient Greek.

*Bryson:* Well now, does that lyric poetry with its own moving power in any way take the edge off the impact of the tragedy?

*Mitrop:* Not at all. Today we put music in drama, not just to fill the empty spaces, but to join and to fill out the drama.

*Webster:* Yes, and to tighten it, and give an emotional impact, to get the audience into a certain sensitized frame of mind, I should say.

*Mitrop:* I should say that in some cases it is incidental, like the incidental music we have in dramas today.

*Bryson:* But not distracting?

*Mitrop:* No. On the contrary. The incidental music is there to join and also to speak for itself.

*Bryson:* But as music, Mr. Mitropoulos, it was fairly simple, wasn't it? It was mostly chanting.

*Mitrop:* Yes. Music was not an art in that time. It was . . .

*Webster:* A music of words.

*Mitrop:* Yes. There were the words and the dancing and the motions of the chorus. We are not quite sure, really—there are so many interpretations of those things—we are not exactly sure how they did it. But one thing is sure—that the public was absolutely aware, when they went to see this. Every one of them knew the story, to begin with. All the interest of the Ancient Greek people of that time was to go to enjoy how the author tells the story.

*Bryson:* Yes. And his depiction of how the characters met events which they knew were going to happen. But they wanted to see what the people would do, and how the events would happen. And now, bringing the scene down to today, in this country there is Miss Cornell's production, Miss Webster.

*Webster:* And I think that is a very interesting thing, that Anouilh version of *Antigone*. I personally think it's a magnificent play, though I know the purists were furious, because they thought that Sophocles was good enough. But the circumstances under which Anhouil wrote his version of *Antigone* and had it produced seemed to me to afford absolute proof, if it's needed, of the pertinence of the theme to modern times. As you probably know, he wrote it and it was originally produced in Paris during the German occupation of France. Now, it's easy to see how tremendously exciting that must have made it to a French audience. How could he get by? How could

he make the Germans let him write this play and put it on the stage at all, because, of course, they had an absolute censorship. And he in his version of it, which is close to the Greek in layout, shall I say, but modernized—the choruses are replaced by one narrator, sort of *raisonneur*—he gives Creon even more cogent arguments than Sophocles gives him. They are built on Sophocles' arguments, but extended even beyond them. All the same, he knows, and all of the audience must have known—and how the Germans could have avoided knowing is a mystery to me—that when Antigone goes out to be shot—no, to be walled up—he sticks to that version of the legend—she goes out a heroine, and everybody's heart goes with her.

*Bryson:* Miss Webster, does that mean that we are in this day as uncertain about the conflict between conscience and law as they were more than two thousand years ago, and that it's still an issue that civilization has not been able to solve?

*Webster:* I think it's a tremendous issue. I think it extends, or, if you like, narrows down to the issues between democracy and totalitarianism, to some extent. That, of course, isn't an extension of the argument, but it's an aspect of it.

*Bryson:* I hope you mean democracy is conscience.

*Webster:* Did you think I meant the reverse? No, I think democracy in its highest sense necessarily includes a sense of God as God and not a sense of the head of the state as God.

*Mitrop:* We can say this, that any country today which disregards the laws of the gods and justice and what we know from religion is right—we have seen Hitler and Mussolini and, today, also Russia—is also inevitably doomed, no matter how long it might last.

*Bryson:* There's another thing implied in what you two just have said, I think. And that is that, if your conscience is intractable and you must go against the law, then you have to take what comes, you have to take the martyrdom that goes with it.

*Webster:* Yes, but again to follow the extension of the argument which we just touched on, Thebes is a totalitarian state, as presented by Sophocles in this play; and, therefore, what comes with an action such as Antigone's is not a just examination of that action, what we should call a trial by jury or anything else; it is an edict of death—period!

*Bryson:* Yes, but what we have to do today, Miss Webster, is to see how we can construct a country in which this dilemma between law and conscience will be less tragic in people's lives. Isn't that right?

*Webster:* Yes, that is so.

*Bryson:* That means, then, that we can't have a country in which law is absolute, a country in which law can invade people's conscience.

*Webster:* No, those are the dilemmas of democracy which mankind is still trying to resolve. Are they not?

*Bryson:* I would suppose so.

*Mitrop:* Yes, that's our conflict of today. Really, the conflict

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between Russia and ourselves is greater than only a conflict of different political ideologies. For me it's quite clear. The Russians, to begin with, have completely abandoned the church and are completely against religion. They made a religion of their own political affairs, just like Mr. Hitler did, and I'm sure they're condemned.

*Webster*: "Their city will fall," as Sophocles says.

*Bryson*: I'm sure the conflict between conscience and law will always exist, but, at any rate, we can create a civilization in which conscience will have a chance.

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# RACINE

## *Athalie*

EVA LE GALLIENNE • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: The greatest period in French theatre came not very long after the great Elizabethan outburst in England. But there was so much difference between the French and the Elizabethans that writers like Racine and his contemporary, Corneille, represent something much older. They are so much more classical in their way of handling tragic events. They are more like the Greeks, and chose to use more ancient themes. They don't seem to have any contemporary feeling. That may be the reason why Racine is still played currently to enthusiastic audiences in Paris, while most of the Elizabethans, except Shakespeare, have gone into the books. *Athalie* is one of the late plays of Racine, one of the plays he wrote when he was getting old, or thought he was, and had more or less given up the theatre. It is different from the others.

*LeGallienne*: It was a departure, in a way, because it was the first time in the French drama that a biblical theme had been used. It certainly was the first time that the theme of *Athalie* had been used.

*Bryson*: In choosing such a theme, Miss LeGallienne, was Racine the dramatist looking for good material, or was he the reformed rake looking for some way to use the theatre and still not remind people that he had once been what he should not have been?

*LeG*: Actually it was almost a command performance, wasn't it, Mr. Michalopoulos?

*Mich*: In a way it was. Racine really did not want to write plays any longer. He had abjured the theatre for many reasons and suddenly the King, Louis XIV, wanted him to write this play.

*LeG*: And particularly de Maintenon! Wasn't she the one who was responsible?

*Mich*: Yes! Madame de Maintenon was in charge of the girls college at St. Cyr and she wanted a play written for the young ladies that would be in every way edifying. So they got the greatest dramatist of the time to write it. At that moment Racine was going

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through a period of personal moral reformation, and was returning to the principles of his childhood. Of course, he had been brought up at Port-Royal, among the Jansenists, the strict religious order, that, curiously enough, was being persecuted by Louis XIV. Yet Louis liked Racine so much, he was so much in favor, that Racine was never hurt, nor was he ever in any way molested for helping out the Jansenists in their troubles with the government.

*Bryson:* Racine was not only personally reforming himself at this time, but he was in the way of becoming a kind of press agent for Louis XIV. This put him within the inner circle of great respectability.

*Mich:* He was treasurer of the court, he was private secretary to the King. They gave it another name in those days. And he was also the royal historiographer.

*Bryson:* That's what I mean by calling him a press agent.

*Mich:* Yes! Yes! He had to go into the battlefields, for instance, and he was not at all a military man. He used to have to get on a horse—and he couldn't ride—and follow all the king's battles in order to be able to write up the story of the king.

*Bryson:* Now he was ordered by the King and the King's friend, Madame de Maintenon, to write an edifying play for a girls' school. So, he took one of the most horrible stories in the Old Testament!

*LeG:* The first one he took was the story of Esther. This was the second one. Esther was such a success that they wanted him to write a sequel.

*Bryson:* So he took the story of Athalie, or Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, who had all of Jezebel's evil in her, and who in order to extirpate the seed of David, which she didn't want to occupy the throne ever again, proceeded to have all her own grandchildren killed, except for one who was saved and hidden away in the temple. The play is just a disclosure of this child who was the real king.

*Mich:* Exactly. But the play does begin in an atmosphere of blood and carnage and murder which is horrifying.

*Bryson:* It's all horrifying! but how does it happen that this horrifying story, which is in the Second Book of Chronicles, is made into something so moving on such a high plane? It is a horrible story? It's the story of a horrible old murderess who got caught.

*Mich:* Racine takes his central character, this queen who is all-powerful and has a lust for power and is a very wilful woman, and opposes him to a priest.

*Bryson:* A true priest of God.

*Mich:* A true priest of God, but who is also intoxicated with God. He is also a very ambitious man. He is presented in a favorable light, but I think that Racine wants to bring out the fanaticism of this man.

*LeG:* He's like one of the old prophets, isn't he?

*Mich:* Yes! It's quite a fanatical play as well as a magnificent play. Voltaire said of it that it's the masterpiece of the human mind and the masterpiece of fanaticism. I think there's a lot of truth in that.

*Bryson*: Do you think, then, Mr. Michalopoulos, that the two fanaticisms which are in conflict here are the fanaticism of this horrible, blood-stained old woman, who wants power above everything else, who is, after all, sacrificing to Baal, and the fanaticism of Joad, the faithful priest, who, in spite of all the danger, continues to hold to the faith?

*Mich*: The glorious fanaticism of the priest of God, I would say.

*Bryson*: It's power against fanaticism and religion.

*Mich*: It's two powers; it's a good moral power, against the power of evil.

*Bryson*: Of course, fanaticism is a somewhat evil word to apply here, because, although Joad has fanaticism in him, most of his service here is heroic.

*Mich*: I don't think one should stress too much this question of fanaticism, except in relation to something that was inherent in Racine's genius himself, in his so-called profane plays, in the ordinary plays which he wrote when he was younger.

*Bryson*: When he was profane himself.

*Mich*: When he was profane himself! Here he is concerned with the conflict of wills and power in individuals.

*LeG*: Well, don't you think that Joad is fanatical in this situation because he wants to preserve the line of David—knowing that from that line will come the Messiah. That's the thing that really makes him so tremendously fanatical.

*Mich*: Yes, undoubtedly!

*LeG*: That's the crux of the whole thing, isn't it? If Joad had not been of the line of David and, therefore, were not the link between David and the Messiah, he probably wouldn't have felt so strongly.

*Bryson*: Joas—these names are confusing—is the boy who was saved and hidden in the temple until the time of the play, when he was disclosed and Athalie is overthrown, and Joad is the priest. Miss LeGallienne, out of your knowledge of the theatre, can you explain how a dramatist can take so simple an action, because there's very little that happens in this play, and make it so tremendously moving? Of course, it's the secret of the great classical drama, because the Greeks did the same thing.

*LeG*: Yes, they did!

*Bryson*: Nothing happens in this play except confrontations and speeches.

*LeG*: Well, so much has happened before, to begin with, I suppose, that it sort of charged the atmosphere.

*Mich*: Well, you must say that in the finale everything happens. When the curtain is drawn back, the little, tiny king is on the throne and all the Levites come in armed, and there's the whole army of Athalie outside, besieging them; and by the mere impact of the declaration of the young king, the whole of Athalie's power falls to the ground like a pack of cards.

*LeG*: That's right! That scene has almost an operatic quality.

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As you know, it needs music and much action and scenery and everything else. It needs all the trimmings, really, of the theatre.

*Bryson*: I know, but I'm thinking of the almost contemporary Shakespearean drama, the greatest drama in the English language, where, I'm quite sure, if you had this sort of thing—and I don't mean to be making a travesty of it—you'd have had one part of the battlefield with two men chasing each other, with the clashing of swords.

*LeG*: And you would see *Athalie* murder all the children! Yes, you would. You'd have seen it.

*Mich*: Well, Racine keeps to the Greek classical tradition; and all violence is off the stage.

*LeG*: Yes! Precisely!

*Bryson*: And that's exactly what I'm trying to get at. How is it that in the Greeks and in Racine, who was in this sense so profoundly classical, you can get such moving effects without ever seeing any of the things happen?

*LeG*: I think it has a lot to do with the language, of course, and I think that's one reason why it's so impossible to translate it.

*Bryson*: You mean that the French is better at that than the English?

*Mich*: Majestically so!

*LeG*: Yes. The sweep of the Alexandrines in themselves, have a sort of cumulative effect that is enormously exciting.

*Mich*: Miss LeGallienne, I wish you would read us a piece or two.

*LeG*: Well, there's the famous speech of *Athalie*, you know, when she describes the dream, when she sees her mother come to her.

*Bryson*: And her mother is Jezebel.

*LeG*: Yes, her mother is Jezebel, who has come to warn her.

*Mich*: And there again he's using a Greek idea. The dream is so often used in Greek tragedies, the prophetic dream.

*LeG*: Yes, that's right. Well, she says here:

C'estoit pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit.

Ma mere Jezebel devant moy s'est montrée.

Comme au jour de sa mort pompeusement parée.

Ses Malheurs n'avoient point abbatu sa fierté

Même elle avoit encor cet éclat emprunté

Dont elle eut soin de peindre et d'orner son visage,

Pour reparer des ans l'irreparable outrage.

« Tremble, m'a-t-elle dit, fille digne de moy.

Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toy.

Je te plains de tomber dans ses mains redoutables,

Ma fille. » En achevant ces mots épouvantables,

Son ombre vers mon lit a paru se baisser.

Et moy, je luy tendois les mains pour l'embrasser.

Mais je n'ay plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange

D'os et de chair meurtris, et traînez dans la fange,

Des lambeaux pleins de sang et des membres affreux,

Que des chiens devorans se disputoient entr'eux.



'Twas deepest night, when horror falls on man,  
My mother Jezebel before me stood,  
Richly attired as on the day she died,  
Her pride undaunted by misfortune's touch.  
That borrow'd brightness still her features wore,  
Which she would paint upon her wither'd face,  
To hide the ravages of ruthless age:

"Tremble," she said, "child worthy of myself;  
O'er thee too triumphs Judah's cruel god,  
And thou must fall into his dreadful hands,  
Whereat I grieve." With these alarming words,  
Her spectre o'er my bed appear'd to bend;  
I stretch'd my hands to clasp her; but I found  
Only a hideous mass of flesh and bones,  
Horribly bruised and mangled, dragg'd thro' mire,  
Bleeding and torn, whose limbs the dogs of prey  
Were growling over with devouring greed.

*Mich*: A grand and horrible poem!

*Bryson*: Unless you read it as they do on the French stage, what to us seems like an extreme artificiality of the Alexandrine lines, with their rhymes and with their extra syllables, is lost.

*LeG*: Lost in the cumulative effect.

*Mich*: It's inherent in the spirit of the French language.

*LeG*: It's interesting that, when you start to analyze these lines, the cumulative effect gives you the sense of a convention. But each line in itself is very simple, clear French.

*Mich*: Yes!

*LeG*: I can say one of those lines to you now, and it wouldn't sound at all archaic or tortured or over-elaborated.

*Mich*: Well, when I was a boy I was made to say one of those lines over and over and over again: "Pour reparer des ans l'irreparable outrage."

*LeG*: Ah, that's a very good exercise!

*Bryson*: To teach you to speak French correctly?

*Mich*: To learn how to roll the Rs, slightly gutturally.

*LeG*: Yes! That's very hard.

*Bryson*: Let's look at this style, of which you've given us a beautiful example, Miss LeGallienne. It doesn't translate, does it?

*LeG*: I don't think so.

*Bryson*: Why not?

*LeG*: Well, for instance, there's a simple phrase where she tells the priest, Mathan, that she has come to the temple of the Jews, and she says to him: "Pontife de Baal, excusez ma foiblesse"—which is a perfectly simple thing. I can say to you, "Excusez ma foiblesse"—or to anybody. There is nothing tortured or embroidered about it and, for instance, that is translated: "Baal's Pontiff, pardon thou my cowardice"—which is a stilted phrase. There is no reason why it should be so stilted. The phrase is perfectly simple!

*Mich*: Yes, I think it is because ordinary French is naturally

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an urbane and polite language. It's a cultured language in itself.

*Bryson:* And English isn't, Mr. Michalopoulos?

*Mich:* Yes! English is a medium in which cultured people have to struggle to get to beauty, and that is why I think English poetry is greater, because there has been a great effort made by the great poet to express himself in beautiful terms through a medium which is difficult.

*Bryson:* I suppose that's another reason why French prose is so supreme.

*Bryson:* The greatest of modern prose certainly is French prose.

*Mich:* Yes! and it is slightly poetical prose. I think actually the French prose writers are greater than the French poets as a whole.

*Bryson:* Going back to the characters here, Athalie is an evil, murderous woman. Why is she so impressive?

*LeG:* Well, she's a very powerful woman. Is it her courage?

*Mich:* I think it is the situations into which she is put, and her opposition to the various characters. For instance, her opposition as an old, very old, woman to the little child, Joas.

*Bryson:* And Joas is going to ruin her.

*Mich:* And she doesn't know it. There's an irony there. That's the one case in the whole of her life in which she has shown compassion and pity and tenderness, because she begins to be rather influenced by this little child.

*Bryson:* After all, he is her own grandchild.

*LeG:* But she doesn't know that.

*Mich:* And she is suggesting that he come and be adopted by her without knowing who he is. And that one instance in which this horrible woman shows a little bit of tenderness is going to be her downfall.

*LeG:* On the other hand, it isn't only tenderness. It's because in her dream, you remember, she sees this child, this simple, pure, innocent child, and then suddenly he thrusts a dagger into her heart.

*Mich:* In the dream.

*LeG:* Yes. And I think, when she sees him actually in the flesh—she has only previously seen him in her dream and suddenly she comes face to face with him in the temple—there's a thing of dread, of wanting to get power over that child, because of the threat that there was, in the dream, that he was going to murder her.

*Bryson:* Not all tenderness, then?

*LeG:* I don't think so.

*Mich:* You mean, you think that she wants to get him into her clutches in order to murder him?

*LeG:* No, I don't think she wants to murder him, but I think she wants to keep an eye on him.

*Bryson:* Well, like all great plays, this thing is to be played.

*LeG:* Yes, of course, it is!

*Bryson:* Quite undeservedly, I saw Bernhardt do it many years ago.

*LeG:* Oh, it was the last classic role she played.

*Bryson*: Yes, and at that time she had lost one leg and had to be carried in. Of course, in *Athalie* that was all right. She was brought in on a chair. She only stood up once and she stood up with her hands on the arms of the chair, but the one thing out of that play that I remember—I can still feel it in my nerves—is when she faced that boy and said: "Come!"

*LeG*: Well, was it all tenderness?

*Bryson*: It's indescribable. It was tenderness and fear and watchfulness.

*Mich*: And awe.

*LeG*: That's it.

*Bryson*: But there was tenderness in it. There wasn't much left of her, Miss LeGallienne, but she still had a voice.

*LeG*: Oh, yes! I heard her too, at that time. I didn't see her do *Athalie*, but I heard her when she was over here and did a great many short excerpts from various classical plays.

*Bryson*: And you don't really get the French drama unless you hear it done. What you said a while ago, Miss LeGallienne, about it's having a musical quality, with some choruses and some music, is part of it after all.

*Mich*: There's a magnificent noise to it. It's very much like Aeschylus, who relies a lot on the qualities of sound in his phrases, which are high-sounding phrases, majestic phrases. I found that Racine is very like Aeschylus.

*Bryson*: Do you suppose the little girls of the girls school where it was played knew what it was all about?

*LeG*: I don't like to think of what that performance must have been like, Mr. Bryson. Can you imagine, for instance, the high priest played by a school girl? They played all the parts. It must have been horrifying.

*Mich*: Oh, of course, they did! That must have been horrible.

*LeG*: Of course, afterwards, it became a great play of the years.

*Mich*: The only other rather evil satisfaction I have in reading this is that I must say that the character of little Joas, who is a hateful little prig, really, must have fitted in very well with the characters of those horrible little hypocrites of St. Cyr. This is goody-goodness at its worst, perhaps unconsciously put in by Racine to please Madame De Maintenon. But, you know, when *Athalie* says to him: "What fun do you have here?"—she wants to lure him into having fun—he comes out with this horrible statement:

« Quelque fois, à l'autel,

Je presente au grand prestre ou l'encens ou le sel

J'entens chanter de Dieu les grandeurs infinies. »

Well, his whole amusement is to sing to God's infinite grandeur—a little boy of eight coming out with that!

*Bryson*: You think that even a little boy of the seed of David would have done that?

*Mich*: He probably wouldn't.

*Bryson*: You don't like him for it?

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*Mich*: I don't know that I would have liked little boys of the seed of David.

*Bryson*: Well, what do you do with a play like this now? To the French, this occupies, I should think, a place even higher than Shakespeare does with us. In a sense, it's revered more than we revere Shakespeare.

*LeG*: To begin with, they have the advantage of having a theatre that is subsidized, where these plays can be played constantly and kept alive in the repertory, which we haven't got. If we had such a theatre, Shakespeare would probably be played just as much.

*Mich*: And produced magnificently.

*LeG*: And produced magnificently, with the greatest actors in France.

*Mich*: However, I don't know that this is the greatest play of Racine.

*LeG*: I don't think so. I think *Phedre* is.

*Mich*: I agree! And I have seen *Phedre* produced at the *Theatre Français* in France and it is magnificent.

*Bryson*: But, *Phedre*, of course, is a greater story.

*LeG*: Yes. The reason that *Athalie* is particularly interesting is because it was the first of its kind. It was a departure.

*Mich*: It was a command production and was done for a specific purpose, and you find this greatest of dramatists managing to handle a situation that was a difficult one. I think it's a very remarkable thing that he has made the greatest play out of an assignment which must have been a . . .

*LeG*: A tough one!

*Bryson*: Yes. That demands of us, I think, Mr. Michalopoulos, that we look at Mr. Racine for a moment. It's rather extraordinary, isn't it, that the greatest French dramatist, perhaps the greatest of the French poets, should have spent only a few years of a life that was otherwise devoted to rather ostentatious religion and respectability to writing a small group of very great plays in which the human soul was explored to its depths, the most degraded depths in some cases, and expressed with all this glorious music; and then, after great success, he turns his back on it and says, "After all, I'm far too respectable a gentleman to waste my life on this sort of thing." How do we explain that?

*Mich*: It isn't quite like that. When he was a boy he had been brought up in this religious community; later on he spent a lot of his time making fun of them, and certainly not living according to their precepts. Yet there is a religious germ which was in him and never left him.

*LeG*: And he reverted to it.

*Mich*: He reverted by a psychological reaction.

*LeG*: There was one reaction and then another reaction.

*Mich*: And another reaction and it also coincides with the fact that the French Court had all gone religious.

*LeG*: On account of Madame De Maintenon.

*Mich*: On account of the aging king and Madame DeMaintenon's influence, and they were all saying prayers all the time and being very devout.

*Bryson*: But the drama was in him from the beginning, too.

*LeG*: Yes! There's a lovely story about his reading a profane legend, a Greek legend, while he was with the Jansenists.

*Bryson*: When he was a student.

*LeG*: Yes. And they discovered the book, and they burned it. Then he got another copy of it, and they burned that, too. Finally he procured a third copy, learned it entirely by heart and took it to the head man there and said, "Now, you can burn this with the other books because I don't need it any more." Later he wrote a very bad tragedy on that theme, which Moliere advised him to throw in the wastepaper basket.

*Mich*: You see, God punished him in the end for it.

*Bryson*: I suppose if you really got to the bottom of Racine's character, with what we think we know now about psychology that they didn't know three hundred years ago, one would say that this conflict that was deep in him, between his probably genuine religious impulses, and this desire to write great poetry about all that humanity could compass of evil and good, explains this terrific tension. And, of course, it's the mastery of that tension in the classical form that gives the beauty.

*Mich*: You're probably right, Mr. Bryson, but I hate this discussion to take a Freudian turn.

*Bryson*: Well, I didn't use the name, Freud, Mr. Michalopoulos, and I also said, remember, the things we *think* we know about psychology. At any rate, the tension was there and the glory came out.

# DESCARTES

## *Discourse on Method*

ERNEST NAGEL

•

HAROLD TAYLOR

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I suppose the name of Descartes is as well-known as any name in philosophy. It's been said by quite competent students that, ever since Descartes wrote, what men have been doing is reacting to Descartes, trying to show that he was wrong but not being able to get away from the fundamental turn that he gave to modern thought. He is also said sometimes to be the founder of modern scientific thinking.

*Nagel:* Perhaps it isn't entirely accurate to say that he was the founder of modern scientific thinking, but he was an exponent and a codifier of it.

*Bryson:* You mean, it had already begun, Mr. Nagel?

*Nagel:* Oh, quite a century or two before Descartes wrote there was a great deal of work in the physical sciences, and Descartes wrote against the background of developments that had taken place.

*Bryson:* But not against the background of an attitude which had already been changed?

*Nagel:* No!

*Bryson:* Those scientists, those physicists and biologists of the fifteenth century, Mr. Nagel, didn't have much public acceptance, did they?

*Nagel:* No, indeed not! I think Descartes' great historical value is that he stated explicitly some of the major assumptions under which his predecessors worked, and so he set the stage for subsequent work in the same area.

*Taylor:* The modernity of his approach to philosophy appears to me most clearly when I find that he is considering philosophy as a subject for a discussion rather than as a set of doctrines which one accepts. When you look at what he says about the things he learned from the schoolmen and from his professors in the universities, he is taking a new attitude to the things he has been taught. You recall that after he talks about having become free from the hands

of the tutors he says he was able to think for the first time because he had seen what everyone else had said, and now he was going to go ahead on his own.

*Bryson*: His attitude toward education is crucial to his modernity; he seems to us to be so modern because of this. Can you push that a little bit further? He says that he was free to talk or to think—not to talk but to think—as a matter of fact; he never was very free to talk. There's always a certain timidity in his approach. He always says: "Well, of course, I won't say these things if the authorities don't want me to." But he thought for himself. Was his attitude that his schooling, which was, for his day, rather exhaustive and excellent schooling, was a waste of time?

*Taylor*: No, I don't think so. His feeling, as I see it, was this: "I have now been acquainted with formalities of education. People have told me everything that they know, and they have asserted truths. Now, I am free to look at these truths freshly, because I am not in the grip of my tutors." Of course, everyone feels and thinks that way under the influence of a formal education, and the hope of our time is that students, after they are finished with their formal education, will continue thinking on their own.

*Bryson*: Mr. Nagel, do you think that Mr. Taylor is right in saying that that is a particular modern attitude—"Now that I'm free of my schooling I can begin to think about what it was that I was told"?

*Nagel*: I'm not sure, Mr. Bryson, whether it is modern, but it's certainly a hope which we have to cultivate in our times to a greater extent perhaps than in previous ages.

*Bryson*: You mean that the educators themselves try to teach in such a way that the things presented are things to be—what, Mr. Taylor?

*Taylor*: Well, things to be discussed rather than accepted.

*Bryson*: Things to be discussed rather than accepted. And he did this on his own? You would say that in modern education we try to give people that attitude in their educational lives? Do we?

*Taylor*: Well, those educational systems of which the three of us approve, I think, do that. A good deal of the difficulty is that the students never move through the formality of education on to the Cartesian doubts, skepticism, and then reaffirmation. If we could do that while the formalities are going on, I think we would have a short-cut to Descartes' principal insight, which seems to be to find these truths for yourself, don't accept them from other people.

*Bryson*: His principal insight—find these truths for yourself. But you used the word "skepticism," Mr. Taylor. What kind of a skeptic was he?

*Taylor*: He was a conservative skeptic in that he played a fairly safe game in addressing himself to everything that was known in the seventeenth century. He said, "Let's doubt the whole business, and let's start over again." But he had assumed certain things, such as the notion that there is a substance running through the whole universe which underlies everything, and, as soon as he had finished

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doubting, he immediately brought back substance and started over again.

*Nagel*: Well, Mr. Taylor, it seems to me that Descartes is an example of an attempt to state a general method in which knowledge was going to be achieved in a much more successful way than before and that, in this respect, Descartes is one of a very large company who have attempted to do exactly the same thing, namely, to develop a method which they thought was quite foolproof in the achievement of stable knowledge.

*Bryson*: Philosophers are still doing that, aren't they, Mr. Nagel?

*Nagel*: Oh, very much so, and many of the current discussions of philosophy are really motivated in this general direction. But, apropos of your statement characterizing Descartes as a conservative skeptic, that can be supported by noting that, in spite of Descartes' skepticism, he was essentially still an adherent of a classic conception of science and philosophy, that he was an Aristotelian at bottom, although he was using new mathematical methods rather than the older ones of medieval scholasticism and ancient Greek science.

*Taylor*: I'd agree with you that the point at which Descartes becomes radical lies in the separation between what he did and the previous attitudes to philosophy, and was his emphasis on the fact that, until you have a method by which you philosophize, you can't go anywhere; and he pushed the history of philosophy towards the consideration of method as being more fundamental than doctrines.

*Bryson*: And philosophers are still doing that? What is your book on probability, Mr. Nagel, but a study of method, isn't it?

*Nagel*: It should be that at any rate.

*Bryson*: That's what you intended it to be?

*Nagel*: Yes, indeed! But in connection with this previous statement, Mr. Taylor, it seems to me worth noting that what Descartes was interested in doing was to obtain a basis for absolutely certain and indubitable knowledge, and that his method, at least the one that he hoped to have discovered, was one which would make it possible to start out from principles that were beyond possibility of question and then build a great superstructure of science on a basis of something that was absolutely solid.

*Bryson*: Where does he find those principles, Mr. Nagel? You know, being a professional philosopher, you've long since gone past it, but the average well-read person associates Descartes with one sentence, which he knows perhaps in Latin, "*Cogito, ergo sum*"—"I think, therefore I exist."

*Nagel*: Well, that is an excellent example of the sort of thing that Descartes had in mind. You must begin with something which is intuitively self evident. This statement of Descartes, "I think therefore I am," sometimes is taken to be a bit of reasoning, but, in fact, it is not a bit of reasoning. It is simply a radical insight into a self-evident connection between thinking and existing.

*Taylor*: Some of the other contemporary philosophers have put the thing backwards, as far as Descartes is concerned.



*Bryson*: You mean his contemporaries?

*Taylor*: Ours! As we were saying earlier, the history of philosophy can be considered either as a long dispute about Plato or a long dispute about Descartes. Those who try to refute Descartes from the point of view of science, particularly the science of psychology, would simply say that the proposition which is self-evident is: I exist and therefore I think. So thought becomes a mode of reacting to situations and a way of conducting the life of the organism, rather than thought being a preexisting affair out of which existence comes.

*Nagel*: Yes, Mr. Taylor, except, I suppose, one would have to add that the type of criticism takes its stand on a basis which is entirely foreign to Descartes' own thought. Descartes would have started with a central, intellectual insight, rather than simply a sense of experience; and I think the position that you've briefly indicated is one which starts out with the ordinary affairs of existence and then finally exhibits the intellect as in some way a product of that.

*Bryson*: Are you saying, Mr. Nagel, that in Descartes' mind the important thing is the idea? We remember that he said he tried to reduce everything to a clarity so that it was beyond doubt. He doubted everything as far as he could, but when he couldn't doubt it any more, then it was clear, and it must be truth. At least, that was as near truth as he could get, and the thing that he was getting at there was not a sensory experience but an idea?

*Nagel*: Yes, an idea—very much like the famous example that he gives, and like others which are also familiar to most of us from our school study of geometry, where we learn to begin with some assumptions that seem to us perfectly self-evident. I wonder whether this may not be a good place to make some brief comment on the adequacy of Descartes' conception. Descartes hoped to build a sound science on the basis of self-evident truths. Now, our position today is very foreign to this approach. We do not believe, for example, that you can in principle doubt all things, because, in the very process of doubting, you frequently assume something which you do not happen to recognize as being open to doubt. In point of fact, if one examines with any care Descartes' argument, one finds almost in the very first step that he takes for granted certain assumptions of the medieval schoolmen which he thought he had dismissed.

*Taylor*: One of the first ones is simply that ideas are self-evident. As you say, he has an intuition which supports the proposition: "I think therefore I am." And his conception of where that intuition comes is that this is an idea, whereas, later skeptics may say, "This isn't fundamental; the fundamental thing is feeling or sensory impression, and not an idea as distinct from the world of the senses."

*Bryson*: Yes! But you said earlier, Mr. Nagel, that he was one of a long line of men—Bacon, Locke, Hume, Kant, and even the modern pragmatists—who tried to put science forward by seeking method, but now we say that the method which he offered was faulty. The service of the method, nevertheless, was very great. Is that right?

*Nagel*: Oh, I think so, Mr. Bryson.

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*Bryson:* Well, what about the others? Is that the inevitable fate of philosophers, who, in modern terms, try to seek a sure method for sure knowledge, that they push us forward if they're good, even though what they do is in itself faulty? Nobody finds a perfect method but the attempts give us forward progress?

*Nagel:* Yes, indeed! I think two points in this connection might be made. The kind of method that Descartes was hoping to achieve was one which would enable him, and those who accepted it, to make new discoveries. That is, he hoped to set down a series of rules so that anybody who was familiar with them would then be able to make discoveries of his own on the strength of them. This also, I think, was characteristic of Francis Bacon's ideas. Some of the modern systems which attempt to develop method, may not have exactly this approach. They do not want a method in the sense of providing rules of discovery, but a method in the sense of providing rules for testing assumed discoveries. I think what is characteristic of modern pragmatism and positivism illustrates that.

*Taylor:* If you could go back to what Descartes did discover in his approach to method, the one thing he did which has had a deep influence on all the peoples who have worked after him was to divorce the problem of studying human nature, its physiology as physics, its chemistry as psychology, from any control by a religious preconception or by a set of doctrines which would prevent your talking about the human being in his scientific aspect.

*Bryson:* But, Mr. Taylor, his dualism is one of the things that he is most criticized for. Are you saying that, in spite of the fact that it was philosophically faulty, it was enormously influential and useful?

*Taylor:* It's a very handy thing to have in that, if you separate the mind from the body, then you've got two separate fields of inquiry in which it's legitimate to find out all you can about each. Without ever saying that the body was inferior or superior to the mind, you could investigate the body and reach some pretty radical conclusions which have ended, by the time the history of psychology had run its course into nineteenth century behaviorism and the other discoveries coming from that, in a new approach to the study of man.

*Bryson:* By saying that the body and the soul are separate, and can be looked at differently and investigated by different methods, he freed men to investigate the body, to investigate physiology, biology, and psychology. In that sense the long line of biological developments since then was pushed forward, although the difference is no longer acceptable.

*Nagel:* I'd like to support your earlier remark in this connection, Mr. Bryson. Although this separation is one that today many of us find extremely dubious, it was a very serviceable separation, even though we now find that we cannot make such sharp separations between mind and body. For example, the existence of so-called psychosomatic medicine is an illustration. Nevertheless, the methodological device of simply studying the physiology of the body, independent

of any questions about the mind as a substantial agent, made possible a tremendous amount of advance in these areas.

*Taylor*: I suppose one of the first things that happened was the invention of new theories of human nature, of the sort that Hobbes represented, in which you take the body as a machine and then dismiss the mind as one of the things which the body does as it works as a machine. By accepting the dualism you give an instrument to philosophers and scientists to invent a new system which then separates off the mind and says: this is a function of the body.

*Bryson*: Looking at the man himself for a moment, Mr. Taylor, how could a man in the seventeenth century, considering the numbers and kinds of thought police that were busy at that time, achieve a thing of this sort? Of course, he was lucky enough not to have to earn a living.

*Taylor*: Well, the odd thing is that, in that day, one of the best ways to do philosophical thinking was to become a professional soldier.

*Bryson*: Which he was!

*Taylor*: In those days, he found that, as a professional soldier, he had more time to himself.

*Nagel*: The modern counterparts are perhaps the people in the nineteenth century who were political prisoners, and who obtained their chief education while they were in prison.

*Taylor*: Yes, these are the hard ways of doing it.

*Bryson*: It was easier for Descartes!

*Taylor*: Because the fighting wasn't quite as intense then, and the other factors in his life made it possible for him to reach a decision. He was going to devote himself to nothing but contemplation, so that his reason for existence was to become clearer, and he could be clearer about truth.

*Bryson*: He had to live mostly outside his native France to be away from the influence of the thought police in his time. "I locked myself up in a room with a stove," he says. Literally, he locked himself up in a room with a stove and thought this thing through.

*Taylor*: This is also not usual today!

*Bryson*: But he didn't join a faculty! That's what I'm thinking about. He didn't go into a university. He didn't associate with professional philosophers. As a matter of fact, I suppose one might say that, when he did get a reputation, it was rather disastrous to him.

*Taylor*: Well, Descartes was really not writing for professional philosophers, as most of them didn't believe the new things he was saying. He was writing for people whom he refers to as the public and, who, in Europe, he felt were the educated men who weren't specifically philosophers.

*Bryson*: Isn't that relaxed, urbane, man-of-the-world method of his part of his continuous charm? You can read Descartes as literature now. He was a very great writer. He did address himself to the ordinary informed man.

*Taylor*: Yes, Mr. Bryson, he did. Also, he was in constant

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correspondence with many of the learned men of his day, not directly, but through a Catholic priest, who was a sort of intermediary. There were no philosophical or scientific journals in the day, and this is the way in which men communicated with one another.

*Bryson:* What I meant by saying his reputation was a handicap to him is that, you remember, he died because Queen Christina persuaded him to come to Sweden and teach her; and the only time she would take his lessons was too early in the morning; and the poor man died of a cold from getting up too early and going out to teach the Queen.

*Taylor:* I think that he's the first example in history of a man who was done in by an overeducated woman. I think that Queen Christina took it a little too hard.

*Nagel:* I hope you teach them better things at Sarah Lawrence!

*Bryson:* What are you reading him for today? You gentlemen are both technical philosophers. What would a man-in-the-street like myself read him for—aside of the fact that he's a great French writer, if you're interested in French prose?

*Nagel:* Well, there are several things. One thing I would like to mention is that he states in an admirably clear way some of the assumptions which many of us tacitly hold to, but which perhaps are not warranted by the current state of knowledge. In this way he makes us realize what it is that we must abandon if science itself is to continue.

*Taylor:* Not only does he suggest that you must examine the assumptions on which you are making a philosophy for yourself, but he insists that you make one. That is, as you read the *Method*, what he's really saying is, as one human being to another: this is what I've been told, and this is what I now think. He's a real encouragement to free speculation of one's own. He's a supporter for the individual who wants to become clear and to reach his own certainty.

*Bryson:* He believes in an intellectual democracy, Mr. Taylor?

*Taylor:* Yes, he does. The *Discourse* opens with that grand statement that good sense is pretty well distributed, and, since no one else wants more than he now has, it must be equal.

*Nagel:* Of course, Descartes put this in a somewhat technical way. By being a champion of what is called the natural light of reason. His appeal to the natural light of reason as making it possible for man to make discoveries of his own without having to have the sanction of authority was one of the most revolutionary and historically significant things that Descartes had to say, because it left every man in the position of investigating a subject matter on his own, without having to have the backing of the police or state authority.

*Taylor:* Well, I'd say, too, that he has something important to say to us as philosophers today, a day in which most philosophy sounds as if it had been written by a committee. It has the abstract minimum prose in it which seems to want to satisfy everyone. Descartes, I think, is saying: an architect of a small building, which has its own kind of perfection, is just as important as a man who

makes a big system with which everyone must agree. And this is an important thing in his message to contemporary philosophers.

*Bryson*: I think all of us with the experience as teachers find that Descartes reassures the young person that, although the truth he might discover for himself would be the same as somebody else had found, the fact that he is allowed to discover it for himself, and is expected to, is the great thing in his life.

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# DARWIN

## On The Origin of Species

ASHLEY MONTAGU      •      ERNEST NAGEL      •      LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Perhaps there are still places in the United States where to say that one believes in evolution is a dangerous remark. In some remote corners—that is, remote, intellectually—there are people who still think that somehow the theory of evolution was invented by a devil named Charles Darwin and that in doing so he struck at the very roots of civilization, virtue, and religion. Mr. Darwin probably would have been very surprised, being a mild and gentle man, to discover that his theories had such repercussions. What did he really set out to do?

*Montagu:* The answer to that question is relatively simple, Mr. Bryson. What he set out to do was to give an explanation of the diversity of animal and plant life, as he saw it, upon this earth. And he looked about him for a solution, as a scientist does, by examining all the data that was unpremeditatedly experimental and premeditatedly experimental. He traveled around the world. *The Voyage of the Beagle* was the title of a book he wrote about that trip. And he observed many interesting facts that he wanted to find an explanation for.

*Bryson:* But, Mr. Montagu, men had been noting those facts for a great many centuries—that the animals and plants are of many varieties. As a matter of fact, Noah found that out. What was wrong with the other explanations?

*Nagel:* Well, there are several ways of explaining this particular set of facts. One of the oldest was the supposition that the different species were simply the products of a special creation, each species being created on a special occasion.

*Bryson:* A literal acceptance of the Old Testament story?

*Nagel:* This is a tradition that goes back not only to the Old Testament but, in a sense, to Greek times as well. But there are other ways of viewing this—which also go back to antiquity—according to which the different species are simply the products of a slow

growth, in which there is a sort of a continuous development. Then the problem became twofold: first, to establish the fact of such development, and; secondly, to offer an explanation for the way in which this development occurred.

*Montagu*: Yes. And the explanation that Darwin found was actually in the pages of a book written by the most influential writer on the problems of population who has ever lived, namely, Thomas Malthus, who, as you know, was both a clergyman and a mathematician. In 1838, while riding in his little carriage, Darwin says in his autobiography that he came upon this passage, and like a flash it dawned upon him that this was the answer; namely, that, since the animal forms and plant forms tend to increase in a geometric ratio—that is to say, two, four, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four—whereas the food supply, the means of subsistence, increases in arithmetic ratios—that is, two, four, six, eight, ten, etc.—it is obvious, as Malthus rather drily remarks, that anyone who has a slight acquaintance with numbers will readily see that the population will outrun the food supply and, hence, that there will always be a large excess of animals and plants, that will have to die.

*Bryson*: So the question was: who was to die?

*Montagu*: Exactly!

*Nagel*: The whole problem here can be stated in logical form. Given the assumption that organisms multiply geometrically, and given the further assumption that the number of members of a given type of organization remains constant, there must be some way of reducing the number. So the conclusion was immediately drawn that there must be some type of struggle for survival.

*Bryson*: So, Darwin has this basic idea, which is always one of the tags of Darwinism, "the survival of the fittest." And those that can best resist the grinding difficulty of nature survive.

*Montagu*: That is where Darwin took over the idea of Malthus. He says, in the introduction to his book, that this is Malthusianism taken over from its application to man and applied to the whole animal and plant kingdom. He asks, "What are the causes which will keep nature in balance?" And he draws here upon Malthus. Malthus said: famine, starvation, disease, and death. This is what Darwin says: this is the struggle for existence.

*Bryson*: Now, you're putting it in its grimmest form, Mr. Montagu. Darwin, of course, has this grimness attributed to him. One of the things that is often disputed about him, is whether or not that other phrase, "nature, red in tooth and claw," was to him a total description of nature. Do you think it was?

*Montagu*: Well, in his *Origin of Species*, he puts it in the following words, if I may quote: ". . . a ratio, if increased so high as to lead to a struggle for life and, as a consequence, to natural selection in attaining divergence of character and the extinction of less improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object of which we are capable of conceiving, namely the production of higher animals, directly follows." Now, observe what he says. In the final paragraph of *The Origin of Species*

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he ends by saying, "There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one, and that whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved." Now, notice what there is in this beautifully-expressed passage: the grandeur. What is the grandeur in this view of life? Famine and death! The most exalted object of which we are capable of conceiving is the war of nature, extinction, the struggle for life, natural selection!

*Nagel*: I think that's a bit of an exaggeration.

*Montagu*: But these are his own words.

*Nagel*: Yes, but I think it is important which part of his words you emphasize. What Darwin saw which appeared grand to him was the remarkable consequences of this, rather than the operation of an admittedly brutal mechanism by means of which the consequences were achieved.

*Bryson*: He did, didn't he, Mr. Nagel, think that the mechanism had certain elements in it that were not so brutal. He did recognize cooperation as an aspect of nature.

*Nagel*: Oh, indeed. And in the *Origin of Species*, at the place where he introduces for the first time the notion of survival of the fittest, he makes quite explicit that the phrase is perhaps not an altogether happy one, because by "natural selection" and "struggle for existence" he understands not simply the competition of one organism with another, but simply the attempt to find ways of living and finding food, moisture, and the proper kind of a climate, which in many cases involves a cooperative effort between members of a given group.

*Montagu*: Yes, Mr. Nagel, he does say this. And I don't want for a moment to be construed as in any way attacking Darwin or his ideas. I have the very greatest respect both for the man and his scientific achievements. But the fact is that, to me, Darwin was a divided man, and in the *Origin of Species* he contradicts himself many times. I must say that, in my recent reading of the work, I went through it with a microscopic eye in order to find anything resembling an exposition of the process of cooperation. I don't even find the word.

*Nagel*: Well, that does not necessarily establish the claim that Darwin had no recognition of the operation of forces which one might call cooperative. The absence of the phrase itself proves nothing, if he can account for those processes that you wish to subsume under it in another way.

*Bryson*: I think this is a far greater question, Mr. Nagel, than trying to be just to Darwin—although we would like to do that. After all, he was a great man and, I suppose, a good one. But, out of Darwinianism, out of this hundred years of thought, as everyone knows, there has developed an application of the biological theories of Darwin to politics and to society. And there are many men, even today—I don't mean the theorists of society today, but the men who are running the affairs of the world—who would justify almost any brutality on the grounds that this is the order of nature. Nature is of



such a sort that the brutal survive and the gentle go down—and if my success proves that I am stronger, that is really the ethics of nature. That's the reason why what Darwin meant is so important, isn't it?

*Nagel*: Entirely, Mr. Bryson. Calling attention to the influence of some Darwinian ideas upon social theories, which were quite fashionable the latter part of the century, calls attention also to some of the consequences which ideas developed in altogether different directions may have, if they are not properly understood and applied. One of Darwin's great contemporaries, Thomas Huxley, took special pains to call attention to the fact that the simple application of Darwinian ideas to questions of morals was entirely illegitimate. Whether he was successful in convincing all of those who attempt to use Darwinian ideas is another matter. One other comment in this connection should be made: although these so-called theories of social Darwinism were very prominent fifty or seventy-five years ago, today they are no longer regarded as having any merit whatever.

*Bryson*: That is, by theorists and philosophers, Mr. Nagel. The question is how much actual vitality do they have in the thinking of the world of politics and business.

*Montagu*: I think, Mr. Bryson, that their vitality is considerable. If we, for example, ask ourselves, out of what context were the Darwinian ideas developed, we find that Darwin was born in 1809 and died, I think, in 1884, that he lived in a period when, so far as he was concerned, poverty was a concomitant of living. The industrial revolution, for example, had just hit England with a bang.

*Bryson*: And he saw misery all around him.

*Montagu*: The working conditions of the lower classes were absolutely unbelievable.

*Bryson*: And he was a rich man.

*Montagu*: He was a rich man, with a very satisfactory income. Hence, Darwin's ideas provided the industrialists of the period with a scientific validation, as it were, for their own activities. Here was a theory which said to them, "Now, boys, you can go right ahead, because you've got what it takes to survive, and the weakest are where they are because they haven't got what it takes."

*Nagel*: I think that's an excellent point, Mr. Montagu. At the same time, it seems to me that a distinction should be made. There are always occasions when one wishes to justify the type of activity in which one is engaged, although the causes for this activity may lie in a very remote sector of society.

*Montagu*: I quite agree.

*Nagel*: Now, there are various ways in which people have attempted to justify their brutality towards one another. Some three or four hundred years ago, Thomas Hobbes developed a political theory. Somewhat older than that is the Calvinistic conception that success in life is an indication of the Grace of God. And that, too, can be used as a way of justifying brutality.

*Bryson*: I don't think Mr. Montagu is attributing to Darwin the whole cruelty of man to man, Mr. Nagel. But he really did give

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a quasi-scientific color to that old idea, that, if one succeeds, it's because he is better, and if another fails it's because he isn't fit to succeed. Darwin gave it a substance. Because he did, as you said before, give the first really substantial and well-worked-out biological justification for the theory of evolution as the explanation of the diversity of creatures. Does that still stand up, biologically?

*Montagu*: It certainly does, in spite of schools which have arisen since Darwin—in the ninety years since Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published, there have been a number of schools who called themselves New Darwinists and other names. What has been done since Darwin's day is merely to strengthen the foundations of his particular theory. And that particular theory is known as the Theory of Natural Selection. What natural selection means is really very simple, although it has been sometimes complexly described. It means nothing more than this: that, in a group of animals or different species of animals, some will leave a greater progeny behind them than others. Now, whatever the conditions are which these animals possess which enable them to leave such a greater progeny are considered to have a Darwinian fitness or, as we call it in this country, adaptive value. If you have adaptive value in any particular environment, then your adaptive value will express itself eventually in your leaving a greater number of progeny behind you.

*Bryson*: Greater number of progeny that will continue to survive. It doesn't mean merely fecundity of birth.

*Montagu*: It means differential fertility.

*Nagel*: It seems to me, Mr. Montagu, that the chief basis for disagreement between contemporary students and Darwin is not so much upon the operation of natural selection as a sort of a sifting agent, but upon explaining some of the variations which Darwin simply took for granted. My impression as an outsider is that the work that had been done in the past ninety years has concentrated upon the way in which these variations in species have occurred. In this respect, if there is legitimate criticism of Darwin as a scientist, that criticism can be made.

*Montagu*: Yes. I think that the statement I made originally, that the foundations of Darwin's work have merely been strengthened by what has subsequently occurred, bears on your point. The variations—why two things are unlike one another since no two things are ever quite alike—are now the concern of those who are interested in the microscopic processes in the hereditary genetic mechanisms, rather than the focus in a debate about the greater macroscopic processes of evolution.

*Nagel*: Darwin's views on the way in which variations or changes occurred are now rejected by most students of this subject in the West, but they have been revived, although in somewhat altered form, in countries which have condemned, for reasons that are perhaps a little bit difficult to understand, the developments in genetic theory. Obviously, I'm referring to the Soviet Union.

*Bryson*: I was wondering why you were being so cryptic, Mr. Nagel. In Russia, where they think environment is the primary in-

fluence in accounting for what changes take place in the organic world, they have gone back to a kind of simplified Darwinism, which is not the modern interpretation of Darwinism.

*Montagu*: Darwin was a Lamarckian, or, at least, partially a Lamarckian. He believed in the possibility of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Now, all the work that has been done since Darwin wrote, and which has been calculated to throw light upon this problem, yields completely negative results.

*Bryson*: Except what's done in the Soviet Union. Nature seems to work in a different fashion, somehow, over there!

*Montagu*: By special dispensation of Karl Marx.

*Bryson*: Mr. Marx changed biology as well as economics. Well now, what about the influence of this in philosophy, Mr. Nagel?

*Nagel*: Darwin's work has had a profound influence, some obviously to the good, some perhaps of a questionable kind. For one thing, Darwin's attempt to establish and explain the fact of variations has challenged an age-long view that that which is permanent has some sort of a special sanctity. That approach to problems of the world which was initiated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the metaphysical sciences (where it was no longer regarded as a particularly meritorious aspect of natural things that they should be permanent) was employed by Darwin in connection with matters that were much more challenging to human interests.

*Bryson*: So he dissolved or weakened this false valuation of durability?

*Nagel*: Very much so! And, of course, this is essentially a part of the tradition that goes back to Aristotle. It's a battle that has had to be fought in every generation, concerning what were the proper objects of knowledge, and in what way proper knowledge was to be achieved. Darwin's work is of paramount importance in altering the type of inquiry that was conducted in biology.

*Bryson*: What about his putting man back into nature, as has sometimes been said, and reminding man that, after all, he was an animal and that there was an unbroken continuity between his physical self and anything else he might want to attribute to himself—his spiritual or mental self?

*Nagel*: That, too, has had very important consequences for work both in biology and in technical philosophy. Instead of regarding the various activities of human beings in particular as existing in separate, water-tight compartments, Darwin's influence has made emphatic the instrumental character, the usefulness of the mind in the operations of the body.

*Bryson*: That would almost make him useful to democracy, in contradiction to the interpretations that make him a defender of aristocracy.

*Nagel*: Very much so, Mr. Bryson. It seems to me that in this respect Darwin exemplifies what I take to be the heart of the mature naturalism; namely, that you look for a justification of values not to the origins of things, but to the way in which they developed, to the fruits which they yield.

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*Montagu*: In other words, it's not motives that count, but consequences. And this, of course, holds for everyday life. I couldn't help being amused at the phrase that Mr. Nagel used a moment ago, in which he said, "this is a battle which has had to be fought in every generation." You see, here is the influence, I believe, of Darwin. Why not say that here is something that we have to discuss or re-discuss again in every generation?

*Nagel*: Mine is the language that was used, I think, even in Greek antiquity.

*Bryson*: Well, the idea is that truth has to be fought for. Certainly Darwin gave that idea a kind of respectability and a kind of dramatic force. But the changes that have come in the ideas about the mechanism of evolution have not changed the basic idea that the diversity of forms has come through processes.

*Montagu*: No, that has not changed. The findings of the geneticists have cleared up some of the points upon which Darwin was doubtful—he was doubtful about the business of acquired characteristics; he had a particular theory of his own about heredity; and he didn't know about the microscopic particles of heredity that we know about now—but the fundamental fact is that his discoveries really have been thoroughly supported by our modern findings.

*Bryson*: So the revolution which he created still holds.

# HERODOTUS

## History

CLIFTON FADIMAN

•

MOSES HADAS

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Herodotus has been called the "father of history" with very good reasons, since he was the first historian of the western world that we really know anything about. He has also been called the "father of lies," which, I suppose, is more a tribute to his lively imagination and style than it is a condemnation of him for inaccuracy. He undertook to do something which was very important to the Greeks. He gave them a kind of a place in the history of the world.

*Hadas:* Yes, Mr. Bryson. I would like to say at once in regard to the "father of lies," that Herodotus is a man whose credit has been going up every year since the Renaissance. The more we find out about the ancient Near and Middle East, the more respect we have for Herodotus' views. He came from Halicarnassus, which was in Asia Minor. He came to maturity during one of the most exciting periods in the world's history, when the Greeks had turned back the Persian invaders. He was born presumably about 484 B.C.

*Bryson:* That was one of the first great conflicts between the West and the East, Mr. Hadas, wasn't it?

*Hadas:* It is the first of which we have any record, and the first, I'm sure, which was meaningful to us. He lived at Halicarnassus, which was by way of being the crossroads of the world. Only a man who lived in Asia Minor, for example, would have had an opportunity to hear all of the lore and all of the stories which were handed down from Persia and even as far as India and Egypt. Then he moved to Athens, where he became a friend to the great wits of the day. He was particularly close to Sophocles and, presumably, to the other great thinkers and orators of his time. He wrote this history in nine books, subsequently named after the Muses, and he states that his purpose is to prevent the famous deeds of the Greeks and barbarians from falling into oblivion. The plan of his book is rather simple. He states the theme and then proceeds to give the "line-up,"

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so to speak, of the two sides. This involves him in a great many digressions, possibly ingressions, because he takes Books Two and Three to talk about the Egyptians and the Ethiopians, and Book Four to tell about the Scythians. In Book Five, you get down to cases with the Ionian revolt against the Persians, and from there on to the end, he covers the two Persian Wars, in 490 and 480 B.C.

*Fadiman*: Yes, the digressions that Dr. Hadas talks about, I suppose represent a large part of the book.

*Bryson*: Perhaps, Mr. Fadiman, that is the source of the man's charm, which is spoken about so often by people who read Greek for pleasure.

*Fadiman*: Well, it is charming if you are willing to dip into this enormously long book just from time to time, but, if you try to read it from beginning to end, in two weeks, as I had to do on orders from my stern schoolmaster, Dr. Bryson here, it becomes very difficult. As a layman, a non-scholar, I would warn folks who want to read Herodotus that the thing to do is to read him in tiny bits. Wouldn't you say that, Dr. Hadas?

*Hadas*: Well, I'm sure nobody in antiquity had the time to read him in two weeks. That is only for the modern student, who is preparing for an examination by Dr. Bryson.

*Fadiman*: Well, perhaps . . . perhaps not only did they not read him in two weeks, but they didn't read him at all. Isn't it true that, as far as we know, much of this history was recited orally in the market places of Athens and elsewhere, as a sort of theatrical performance?

*Hadas*: Yes!

*Bryson*: He was a public story-teller.

*Hadas*: His performance was part of a festival, usually. But we forget that, when Herodotus was first published, so to speak, he was practically without competition. This was the first great prose book we have; and in those days people had a lot more time, and perhaps a great deal more curiosity, which wasn't so easily satisfied in other ways. I think it's a mistake to try to read Herodotus or even Homer at one sitting.

*Bryson*: Yes, I'm sure that's true.

*Hadas*: It was never done in antiquity.

*Bryson*: This charm, which is so often spoken of, is, however, not the substance of Herodotus. It's not only because he's charming that the Greeks loved to repeat his stories and think about them. This had for the Greeks something like a justification of their place in the world. It was the heroic phase of their modernity. As Homer told them about their heroic past, Herodotus told them that they were still heroes.

*Hadas*: In point of fact, the story of the Persian War is much more important, I should think, to the Greeks than the story of the Trojan War. They never, never tire of it, and Greek politicians today, when they make a claim upon the sympathy of the world say, "We turned back the Persians." Certainly, all of the Greek orators

two centuries after Herodotus' own day never tired of ringing that same note over and over again.

*Fadiman*: Well, I should think it's thoroughly justified. After all, the great battles that we do remember, the wonderful defense, unsuccessful as it was, at Thermopylae, Salamis, Mycale, Plataea, these names still ring in our ears. Herodotus did happen to select a high point in the cultural history of Europe, perhaps accidentally, and certainly fortunately. For most of our emotion about the heroic stand of the Greeks against the Persian barbarians is derived from Herodotus. Drop out Herodotus and our textbooks of Greek history become almost blank.

*Hadas*: Well, isn't that true? That's certainly true.

*Bryson*: Actually, about all we know of that period is what we get out of Herodotus, isn't it?

*Hadas*: It is! We know about the one battle of Salamis from the long speech in Aeschylus' *Persians*. Aside from that we've nothing else.

*Fadiman*: He was there?

*Hadas*: He was there. He fought in it. The one thing that Mr. Bryson has said in regard to charm, which he rather dismissed as being frivolous . . .

*Bryson*: No, I don't mean to! That's your bad conscience, Mr. Hadas! I'm not dismissing charm as unimportant. What strikes me is this: the tremendous achievement of Herodotus is that he can give you such an enormous amount of knowledge about all kinds of things and still keep you charmed.

*Hadas*: I think that is one of the most notable things about this book—particularly as compared to other classics, which are all so intense and high-strung and demand so much of you. Here's a man who is the only one who is almost on your own level. You don't have to crane your neck to look up at him all the time and shield your eyes from the bright light. This is a man who tells stories charmingly, tells them so beautifully that, when you go back and try to look up a story that you remember, you find it's told in three or four lines, and you had thought it was two or three chapters.

*Fadiman*: I think that's perfectly true, but there's a reverse side to that medal, too, I think. The man who is eminently charming and who is a preeminently good story-teller as Herodotus is has the defect of those qualities—a lack of intellectual grasp. It's very difficult to discover more than a thin guiding thread of idea in this long history. When you come to Thucydides who followed Herodotus, you see the contrast between a man, who, like Herodotus, is essentially a story-teller, a collector of logoi, fables, tales, legends, and a man, who, like Thucydides, is interested in analyzing the causes and effects of a great conflict, in his case the Peloponnesian War. . . . Herodotus is not, in our sense of the word, an intellectual historian or a philosophical historian, would you say?

*Hadas*: I think that Herodotus conceals his art, and even his philosophy, in an admirable way. It's true he doesn't talk in abstractions. He doesn't talk about movements and forces and so on. But,

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when he starts his book with Croesus and Solon and tells you, two, apparently diverting stories, he actually sets a profound note for the whole conflict. From the conflict of Croesus with Solon we get the notion of what these two different people stood for: Croesus, who was so sure that wealth was power, the greatest thing in the world; and Solon, who refused to acknowledge that. Croesus shows Solon all of his wealth and then says rather smugly: "Tell me, who is the happiest man in the world?"—feeling rather sure of the answer. But Solon says: "The happiest man in the world is Tellus, the Athenian. He was a GI. He fought in the line. He died and was buried at public expense, and, therefore, he is a happy man." Croesus was a little miffed. He said: "Well, the second happiest?"—thinking surely he'd get second place. "Well," Solon said, "the second happiest were Cleobis and Biton, two Argive young men who carried their mother to the temple for a festival; and the mother prayed there that the goddess would give them the very best gift in her power; and in the morning they were dead." Again, the ordinary, dutiful, liberty-loving, individualistic Athenian or Greek as against the autocratic oriental.

*Hadas:* There is another story right along with it, which seems to me the other half of this thing, the story of Adrastus, a man who was under a curse and came to Croesus. Croesus literally saved his life and gave him a new personality. He owed everything to Croesus and wished to help Croesus; but it turns out that this man, by an accident of fate, kills Croesus' only good son—the other one was a deaf-mute—with no intention on his part, only the best intention in the world. Well, there you have why there was a fight between the Greeks and the Persians—or East and West, in larger terms—and a kind of philosophy of history.

*Fadiman:* Well, I'll agree that there is a certain thin thread of moralizing here, that Herodotus is saying what the average man of his time would have said, to wit—that he who is too powerful becomes evil through the exercise of power and, therefore, in the end the gods will strike him down; a commonplace of Greek thought.

*Bryson:* And also, Mr. Fadiman, that the gods sometimes strike you down just because that's the way the gods are. Adrastus is under a curse. He wasn't a bad man.

*Fadiman:* That's true. If you want to call this a philosophy of history I'll agree to use the term. It seems to me somewhat thin and banal as compared with, let's say, the majestic interpretation of history that you get in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. I'm willing to agree that Herodotus is generally readable and a charming man and that you learn a great deal from him. I would merely add that he's not a philosophical historian in our sense.

*Hadas:* He doesn't present you the philosophy ready-made; he tells you the story. It's a different thing he does from that which Thucydides or Gibbon do. Here are all the things that are to be said about these people. The moral lesson of the advantage of liberty over tyranny, or things of that sort, are not stressed. They are there for you. We are not talking in abstractions. We are not philosophiz-



ing. We are giving you a complete, full amount of information, which is also delightful; and then you can deduce from it whatever you like.

*Fadiman*: True enough. However, some people think it the duty of the historian to interpret an event as profoundly and as analytically as he can. This Herodotus does not do. I think when Mr. Hadas used the word "information," he was stressing the important thing about Herodotus. Here is a man who traveled around the Mediterranean, spent perhaps fifteen, twenty years doing that, visited outlying portions of the Mediterranean world, penetrated into Egypt, Lybia, Thrace, and the countries of Asia Minor. He collected all of the stories, all of the legends, all of the fables that were current in his time.

*Bryson*: Was he a good reporter, Mr. Fadiman?

*Fadiman*: He was! As I read him, I found myself making a comparison with a modern journalist, such as John Gunther, who will take a continent at a time and describe the leading personalities of the period, give you some of the social and political background, and so forth, writing not as a historian, but as a first-rate journalist. Herodotus seemed to me much more that kind of man than a man like Gibbon or Thucydides. He was a leg man. He visited Egypt, talked to whoever he could there, checked up on stories by going to visit the oracles in all sorts of outlying places. He's an interviewer. That seems to me his main interest for us, the fact that he gives us the only picture we have of what the whole Mediterranean world was like as far as social customs were concerned, its geography, its ethnology. He was the first ethnologist, the first geographer of whom we have anything more than fragments. Here, in Herodotus, is the cradle of so many of our modern sciences, put together somewhat higgledy-piggledy, but nevertheless there.

*Bryson*: And another thing—which you hinted at before, Mr. Fadiman—he did all this with a kind of detachment which we today would admire very much. There's no chauvinism in this.

*Fadiman*: No!

*Bryson*: He's fair to everybody.

*Fadiman*: Mr. Hadas, in his excellent summary at the beginning of this conversation said this is a story of the conflict between the Greeks and the barbarians, but, of course, as Mr. Hadas would have gone on to say, there is no pejorative meaning to the word barbarians. . . .

*Hadas*: And I think he is the last man actually who was able to write history that way.

*Bryson*: Only one man in history ever wrote history without being biased?

*Hadas*: Well, he is not biased. He is not upholding any cause against the other. What is right for the Indians is right for the Indians—that they eat their fathers instead of burying them. And what is right for the Greeks is right for the Greeks, and not only as against the barbarians, in which word, I must repeat, there was no pejorative meaning whatever—that comes in later—even as between

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the Greeks, which was much more difficult. There was no partisanship as between Athens, where he lived, and Sparta. When he tells you that the Athenians were the saviors of Hellas, he does it in the most unobjectionable way possible. He gives you a long analysis of seapower against landpower, and points out that, were seapower missing, the Persians could land at will on the Peloponnesus. And then he says very modestly: "If, then, a man should say that the Athenians were the saviors of Hellas, he would not be wrong."

*Fadiman*: He was, then, not only the first but perhaps the last of the universal historians. Here is a man who took an ecumenical point of view, which was lost after his time?

*Hadas*: I agree absolutely with everything that Mr. Fadiman has said. I think he's being a little anachronistic in demanding more of Herodotus, and perhaps a little ingrate for all that Herodotus has given us.

*Fadiman*: All I am trying to do is to indicate what is lacking for the modern reader. No one can deny the greatness of Herodotus, and the fact that he started many things.

*Hadas*: You mean what is lacking, shall we say, for a modern reader's taste, or for Mr. Fadiman's tastes, who likes philosophic history. But we all like to know. That is an appetite, a general appetite, particularly Greek appetite.

*Fadiman*: Agreed!

*Hadas*: Aristotle starts his *Metaphysics* by saying, "Man by nature desires to know . . ." Now, here is a man with an insatiable curiosity, with a gift for seeing the right things. He goes to Egypt, and he sees the things that an intelligent man ought to see. He sees the things in Babylonia that an intelligent man ought to see, and he reports them to us without abstractions. This is not philosophy; in a sense, perhaps, it is drama. It is not abstractions; it is personalities; and you don't have to spell these things out for adults.

*Bryson*: Being a very great artist, Mr. Hadas, he often tells you a good story, even though he admits that it probably isn't true, just because it's a good story.

*Hadas*: He says that he doesn't believe it. He says: "I report these stories, and they have their value, as they were told me; and this applies to my whole book." There's the fascinating story of the two thieves of the king's treasure. Well, now, that can't have been true—the princess behaving the way she did to get information from thieves and so on—nevertheless, it's as important to know that story to understand the Egyptians as for us to know about George Washington and the cherry tree—which also didn't happen.

*Fadiman*: One of the important factors in history is the lies that people will credit; what we believe is an index to our character.

*Hadas*: And what we *think* we're fighting for, whether that happens to be the truth or not. It is important what the differences *appear* to be. It may be that the explanation of the war is economic or imperial or something, but here's what they thought they were fighting for. That seems to me to be at least as important as the other, perhaps real, reasons.

*Fadiman*: As a record it's invaluable. As interpretation, well . . .

*Hadas*: Herodotus was a very modest man. He's not like your journalist who can analyze the whole world and unscrew the inscrutable and so on.

*Fadiman*: I don't want to be in the position of attacking Herodotus, whom I greatly enjoy. I just want to point out how his history differs from the kind of history we're used to. The word "history" meant, in the Greek, did it not, Mr. Hadas, inquiries or researchers?

*Hadas*: That's all! "Research" is much too heavy a word. I think "inquiry" is a better word. These questions are asked; these are the answers that are received. It's important to record these answers whether they're true or not.

*Fadiman*: Agreed! But that's not what we call history now. That's the only point I wanted to make. It's a good thing in itself but to call this history seems to be somewhat of a misnomer. These are the answers to a series of questions put by Herodotus to thousands of people in the course of fifteen or twenty years of traveling around the Mediterranean. It's bound together, of course, by this unifying theme of the conflict between the East and the West. And I do think it's only fair to state that the last three books, the story of the tremendous aggregation of the Persian monarchy's army and his march from east to west has a majestic build-up that is really quite overwhelming. I think he's a fine narrator.

*Bryson*: I don't think you meant to give the impression, Mr. Fadiman, that his story-telling power is mere gossip. He has great sweep and dramatic power. But you raised another question, which I would like to know the answer to, and that concerns his relativism in morals, his lack of parochialism and his lack of nationalism, his willingness to say that the Persians had qualities as well as the Greeks. Now, the Greeks at this time, Mr. Hadas, were just entering into a very self-conscious period of nationalism. Why did they forgive Herodotus his lack of high patriotism? Was it because he was so wonderful a story-teller?

*Hadas*: Because they had yet to learn. Subsequent imperial powers have learned to try to justify imperialism on moral grounds. They are just getting to the Sophist idea of power being its own justification. They're not carrying the white man's burden in their empire.

*Bryson*: The strong nation had the right to rule?

*Hadas*: The right to do what it could do. Of the gods, we suspect, and of the men, we know, that they rule where they can, and they yield where they must, and that is the philosophy on which you operate. But the one point of the advantages of liberty, the Greek view as against the Oriental view, which is repeated again and again and where Herodotus is at his best—that must not be overlooked; and I think it gets more power from being dispersed, so to speak.

*Fadiman*: Yes, I would agree there!

*Hadas*: When the Spartan emissaries go to Hydarnes, he, with the best will in the world, says: "Why aren't you friends with king?"

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Look how beautifully I'm dressed in purple. Look at my elegant table. Come over to us." And they reply: "You just don't know. You're not in position to give advice. You know only half of the story. You know only what it is to be a slave. If you knew what it was to be free, then you would advise us to fight . . ."

*Fadiman*: There is no question that in his portraits of the Persian kings, Darius and particularly Cambyses, he is endeavoring to oppose these maniacal, excessive capricious, whimsical monarchs with the more rational Greeks, in whom the idea of justice had already been born. He presents a conflict between two kinds of thinking—power-thinking and justice-thinking.

*Hadas*: A landmark of the very greatest importance in history and one which is as timely today as it ever was.

*Bryson*: I think perhaps one could also say that, in spite of the charm, the pace, and the wonderful story-telling power, there is underneath, although sometimes it's very deeply buried in Herodotus, the typical Greek sense that the fate of man is tragic, and that history is, after all, a very tragic tale.

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# CARLYLE

## History of the French Revolution

GEOFFREY BRUUN

• WALTER COHEN

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* When Carlyle, who wasn't very well known at that time, published *The French Revolution* in 1837, there must have been a good many people in Europe who could remember the French Revolution. After all, it took place only about a generation earlier. He gave it a kind of dramatic power, however, a size and grandeur which we have associated with it ever since. I've often wondered if our feeling about the French Revolution was largely Carlyle, rather than the other historians who have treated it.

*Cohen:* Oh, I think that's certainly true, Mr. Bryson. Our sense of the episodes and pictures in the revolution is largely derived from Carlyle. The way we imagine the execution of the King, Charlotte Corday's assassination of Marat, and such things as that, largely derive from the description that Carlyle has furnished us. But I wonder if to take the French Revolution as history, to read it as a history of a protracted event, is not to take it almost at its lowest and least important level.

*Bryson:* What would you call it, Mr. Cohen?

*Cohen:* Well, it is so much more than a history, Mr. Bryson. It's a reading of life, so to speak; it's a prophecy. It's an interpretation of the whole course of human events and applies specifically to the life of the individual reader. It's a moral drama, really, rather than a history.

*Bruun:* Yes, it's more than history, as you say; but it's also less than history.

*Bryson:* Is it good history, Mr. Bruun?

*Bruun:* No, I'm afraid that one can't say it's good history. Of course, Carlyle called it *The French Revolution—A History*, and he wrote from very limited sources, chiefly from memoirs. He tried to base it—he said he was basing it—on facts. In fact, he said any history that isn't founded on belief of provable fact has no foundation at all. But he, himself, founded it on emotion, on these tremendous word pictures; they were dramas.

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*Bryson:* Mr. Bruun, for a historian to start out by saying, "Unless I found my history on fact, it isn't worth reading," is about like a bank teller assuring you that his bank is honest when you're putting your money in. Wouldn't you have taken that for granted in a historian who really was accurate?

*Bruun:* I think Carlyle protested too much. I was quoting Carlyle when I said that about history being founded on fact. I think he felt that he had a substratum of fact; he also felt that he had a resource and knowledge in his readers that he could draw on. After all, Carlyle was writing about practically a contemporary event. He was introducing the French Revolution to people who knew about it already, through hearsay and gossip. He was giving them an orderly account of it, a redaction, as he would have been pleased to call it. But he felt that he was doing much more than that. He wrote to his brother, "No book for a hundred years," he said, "has come more flamingly and vividly from the heart of a living man"—certainly not an historian's attitude.

*Bryson:* No, that's not a historian's attitude, and I wonder if even the people so soon after the French Revolution could have known as much about it as Carlyle seems to assume. If one reads it now, hoping to find out what really happened in France in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, he gets a lot of names and a lot of vivid scenes, but he doesn't get much chronological information.

*Cohen:* No, he's going to turn to the chronological table which, fortunately, is printed in almost every edition of the book for information.

*Bruun:* The printing of that table is the admission that the book was chronologically deficient. There are passages in Carlyle that are scarcely more historical than Shakespeare's plays. They have the same power, the same immediacy. He takes you in there and makes you live with these people. In that sense, he's writing history—or imaginative history.

*Cohen:* But to come back to that, Mr. Bruun, is it a defect in the book that we have so often to refer to the chronology? Is it a defect in Carlyle? You might say that it is, if you view him as an historian, as a man who attempted to write history. But, if you take him from the other point of view that I suggested, as a man who is merely using history as a text on which to deliver a sermon, it no longer becomes a defect.

*Bruun:* I think it does. I think Carlyle wrote *The French Revolution* with a certain philosophy, a rather cloudy, mystical philosophy, and tried to make the events of the revolution fit and vindicate his philosophy. Well, that is bad history-writing.

*Bryson:* It's bad history, because—is this what you mean, Mr. Bruun?—although the moral drama is there, and it's in history, as history happens, he made his moral points by twisting history a bit.

*Cohen:* I wonder if he did really twist them. I should like to ask you, Mr. Bruun, if it is conceivable that any historian should not have some theory to which he adapts his facts?

*Bruun:* Oh, that's granted, of course. But Carlyle did it so

obviously and consciously and deliberately. He was writing the history as he saw it and believed it to be. I grant that, and I'm not questioning his sincerity. I think everyone is impressed with his sincerity. But he played his prejudices. For instance, he admires Marie Antoinette intensely. She was not a particularly admirable woman. But in Carlyle she's a tragic and beautiful heroine. "Poor Marie Antoinette," he says, "with thy quick, noble instincts, vehement glancings, vision all too fitful and narrow for the work thou hast to do. Oh, there are tears in store for thee, bitterest wailings." Well, that's what I mean by saying it's not good history. That's good novel-writing.

*Cohen:* Well, you're merely contrasting that with some more sober historians' description of Marie Antoinette. After all, how do we know what anybody in the past was like, except through somebody's prejudiced description of him?

*Bryson:* I don't believe that's quite the point that bothers me, Mr. Cohen. I wouldn't mind his twisting history, but I would like to know, before he changes the characters a bit, who are the moral characters in this drama that he's writing? What is this drama that he's trying to give us in history? Is he trying to show us that the uprising of the French people against intolerable oppression was a movement toward a better society? Or is he trying to depict the woes of the aristocracy—which he does with sentimentality at times. After all, what is the moral drama?

*Cohen:* I think that the moral drama, and the point that he is trying to make, is the one that he can bring home to the bosom of each reader. He addresses readers on particular occasions—two I remember especially. One is when Louis XV lies dying, and there's this dreadful contrast between the weight of pomp and splendor which he has inherited and which he has lived in, and the emptiness in which he is ending his life. And he, Carlyle, points up the fact that he's accomplished nothing. And then, suddenly, he turns from this magnificent height of the King's death chamber and says directly to his reader: "Well, what about you and your brick yard? What are you accomplishing? What about the evil in your own life that is unrinded and is sometimes going to rise and engulf you and bring you to the same pass that Louis is now brought to?"

*Bryson:* But, Mr. Cohen, that is not in Carlyle an attempt to show you that kings and bricklayers are, after all, in the same moral situation, because he loves kings. He doesn't seem to have much love for bricklayers.

*Cohen:* I shouldn't agree with that, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson:* You don't think he loves kings? Not kings because they rule the kingdom, but kings because they're kingly.

*Cohen:* Well, I agree, if you will allow this interpretation of his point. I think that he loves equally the soul in bricklayer and in king, or is concerned—I don't know, really, whether he loved the soul—equally about the soul of each and sees that the soul of each is passing through the same moral crisis and struggling in the same depths. Undoubtedly the pomp of the court attracts him.

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*Bryson*: What I'm getting at is something that, you know quite as well as I, lies behind all this—that he really thought the bricklayer should have a king to tell him what to think and what to do with his soul. In other words, he had certainly, a deeply implied and often explicit love of authority. Didn't he?

*Cohen*: You remember he derives the word "king." He takes it through the German and the Anglo-Saxon and brings it down to the man who can *become*, naturally, the king. I don't know that it's necessarily a serious charge to bring against a writer to say that he believes that the man who can do a thing should be allowed to do a thing.

*Bryson*: Not a serious charge at all. I'm trying to get at the nature of his politics. When he gets the man who can, it seems to me that he makes him the anointed leader.

*Bruun*: Mr. Cohen perhaps missed my point when I said I distrusted Carlyle's *French Revolution* because he made it a vehicle for his philosophy. And, Mr. Bryson, you've brought that very point out. Carlyle's *French Revolution* is a defense of despotism. He laments the fact that the old regime lacked a king. Louis XV, as you say, dies unlamented, a poor king. Louis XVI is a worse king, because he's more feckless and useless, lazy, languid, and incompetent. So all through the six years that Carlyle describes here, he's lamenting the lack of a leader. He almost glimpses one in Mirabeau; and then Mirabeau dies. Then he looks around. Robespierre is a poor substitute. Finally he ends by saying, "The man of reality has appeared on the scene. Napoleon blows away the Revolution in a whiff of grapeshot." Now, that is all an admission that the people could not rule. Here they had six years to try to do something. All they did was a great work of destruction. Carlyle agrees the destruction had to come. But nowhere, it seems to me, does he say that it was the preparation for a democratic government. It was the preparation for a new, enlightened dictatorship.

*Cohen*: I'm caught on an earlier phrase of yours, Mr. Bruun. You call the *French Revolution* a "defense of despotism." In a dozen places Carlyle rejoices over the fact, and proclaims that it is as necessary as it is inevitable, that despotism in France should be swept away by the rising of the twenty-five million who live without bread. You remember he has that wonderful figure, the old peasant woman in the woods gathering three nettles; and by some alchemy the courtier in Versailles can extract one of the nettles from her and call it rent. "This must end," he says; and he turns on the English landlords in that very passage, and says, "It is going to end everywhere. Take care, while you still have time, that it doesn't end as violently in your own circumstances as it did in France."

*Bruun*: Oh, Mr. Cohen, you're quite right in that Carlyle denounced everything he touched, except half a dozen of his pet enthusiasms. But if you understood me to say that his *French Revolution* is a defense of despotism, I didn't mean a defense of the despotism that was being destroyed. It had failed precisely because it



was not an effective despotism. It must be supplanted by one that was an effective despotism.

*Bryson*: But not the despotism of the leader only. It was to be a despotism used for what the leader, knowing better than the people, did for the people's good.

*Cohen*: Yes, it's not blind despotism he's defending.

*Bruun*: No, but it's the despotism in which the people will recognize a heaven-sent leader and will be happy because they have "found a master." That's a favorite phrase of Carlyle's.

*Bryson*: Taking it the other way around, Mr. Bruun, certainly Carlyle shows at no time, as I think you said before, the idea that the French people might learn to rule themselves.

*Bruun*: I found no evidence of that. He says, "Nine men out of ten are fools and cannot rule themselves."

*Bryson*: Well, how does it happen that a man who has this philosophy and isn't writing very good history, gets such a grip on you? After all, this man is not a historian in the technical sense. He's a writer; he's almost an epic poet, although he uses prose. What's the secret of the power of this book? You can't put it down easily.

*Cohen*: Well, I think you could at least signify some of the elements in it. One is his transcendent and crushing sincerity. You know that he believes earnestly, from the bottom of his soul, in everything that he is saying. And one of the other major secrets of his power is his extraordinary literary art. He involves us, literally involves us, in the events that he is describing as probably no other historian has ever been able to do. Also, he brings home to us through his prophetic power—he's a sort of Jeremiah, overlooking the world and pointing out what is right and what is wrong and how the right inevitably rises and the wrong inevitably disappears—the eternal verities, so to speak, the laws by which men must live.

*Bruun*: Yes, Mr. Cohen, I can go along with you on Carlyle as a writer, where I couldn't quite agree with your defense of him as an historian. As a writer, I think he really can be taken as highly as you want to rate him. His prose is tremendously moving. There are those, of course, who object to his colons and semicolons and stop-pages—but it was a perfected and individual style.

*Bryson*: I would say of its crabbedness and staccato quality, if you like it, you like it. But I wouldn't put him on the highest level as a writer, Mr. Bruun.

*Cohen*: Matthew Arnold said, "Flee Carlyle as you would the devil."

*Bryson*: Well, I think the difficulty is that Carlyle, like so many people of great originality, particularly in style, doesn't know when he's writing good Carlyle and when he's writing bad Carlyle. And bad Carlyle is pretty bad.

*Cohen*: Bad Carlyle is bad, but he wrote thirty volumes, including his translations, and no man can be expected to keep on the highest level for all that!

*Bruun*: Even Shakespeare falters now and then.

*Cohen*: And you must give him an additional credit, too, for

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being one of the first writers who was seriously concerned with the tools of his craft; that is, he knew that language was a tool. He says in a passage in one of his journals, this writing and that writing—he mentions a number of books—have nothing to do with literature; they may have something to do with printing, but they have nothing to do with literature. He was trying to write literature. He knew that words were his medium, that they were tools, and he did all that he could to perfect them and refine them.

*Bryson:* And he searches for strange and weird ones, which give you a pleasant shock.

*Bruun:* Oh, some of his language is positive jabberwocky—"tripudiation," for example, or "languescent."

*Bryson:* Well, that's bad Carlyle.

*Cohen:* I don't know, necessarily, that it is. It's unfair, I think, to judge a word taken out of its context. For a sensitive writer, a word either precisely belongs or does not precisely belong. So you must take it in its passage and see what is the emotional effect of it there, what is the effect of color there, what is the effect of strangeness. Oftentimes, I think, when I come across one of his queer phrases, one of his exotic ones, that he's merely trying to suggest the difference that is France. After all, it isn't England; it's France.

*Bryson:* Of course, there's something else underlying this, which you only hinted at a moment ago, and that is that he has extraordinary dramatic power. Some of these instances, like the flight to Varennes, have all the suspense of a novel. You know what's going to happen, and yet it's almost intolerable.

*Cohen:* And yet, of course, you have hope that it is *not* going to happen. And what permits you to hope? I think it's again one of the real tools of his genius—the fact that throughout these two vast volumes or, perhaps, throughout the one vast volume . . .

*Bruun:* . . . At least eight hundred pages . . .

*Cohen:* He uses the present tense. I don't believe that there's another history of this length which is written in the present tense. And the effect of his using the present tense is double. One is to keep us continually reminded of him. He is the continuity of the book. He is speaking all the while. His events need not follow each other in any logical sequence, because he is always at the center of it. The flight we see through his eyes; we think through his mind. And then, too, as he himself points out: from the present tense fear has not been removed; uncertainty has not been removed. If a thing is described as having happened in the past, we know it has happened. We have merely to read to the end of it. But if it is described as being in the present, we're still on tenterhooks. Will it come out? Will it not come out?

*Bryson:* That's a style that has been taken over by the modern newspaper writer, Mr. Cohen. It has become the commonplace in newspaper-writing today.

*Cohen:* And has lost its power.

*Bryson:* Of course, because it's worn out. But it's hard for us

to put ourselves back more than a hundred years and realize the tremendous, electrical, impact of this upon the readers of that time.

*Cohen*: Yes, just take that flight to Varennes, for instance.

*Bryson*: Or Charlotte Corday buying the knife and going to kill Marat.

*Bruun*: Or, of course, the fall of Robespierre in its five acts. It's written as a tragedy.

*Cohen*: Isn't that wonderful? Yes.

*Bruun*: I'm with you on Carlyle as a writer. But doesn't this add up to the fact that we ought to transfer him from the history shelves to the literature shelves and leave him there.

*Bryson*: You mean you don't want literature on the history shelves, Mr. Bruun?

*Bruun*: That's very unkind—and I admit it's a fair charge. But Carlyle's writing was so good that it falsified his history. I'm afraid that a graduate student who wrote like Carlyle would never get his Ph.D.

*Cohen*: He wouldn't need it!

*Bruun*: Ah, Carlyle didn't either! Let me give him an M. A., as Master of the Aphorism.

*Cohen*: You know, you've somewhat taken over my point, Mr. Bruun, in agreeing that perhaps the book should be classified not on the history shelves but among the works of literature. But I think I've come somewhat to your original view, except that I would be more favorable than you were. Is it not, after all, a good history? The chronology is not there. We can find the chronology in any ten-cent almanac. But what else gives us so living and vivid a sense of that period from 1774 to 1795 as Carlyle's *French Revolution*?

*Bruun*: You're quite right, Mr. Cohen.

*Cohen*: What else should history do but that?

*Bruun*: Exactly! At least we cannot say of Carlyle what they said of the writers of the *Cambridge Modern History* volume on the French Revolution that they talked a lot about the Revolution, but they never seemed to realize that a revolution had happened.

*Cohen*: Yes!

*Bruun*: Carlyle started by realizing that a revolution had happened, and then he made his reader know that a revolution had happened. He got parts wrong; but he got the fact over that something tremendous happened.

*Cohen*: Yes! And, certainly, if there is any sense that one has after having gone through this book, after having been jostled about from one scene to another, thrown about and knocked down, it's that he was in a revolution. It may not be precisely the French one, but it was a revolution.

*Bryson*: Would you accept this, Mr. Bruun, that history can be literature occasionally, and that when it is literature, then it is trying to do what Mr. Cohen is talking about, to give you the sense of drama, the sense of character, and the moral meanings of these events. Even though it may not be quite scientifically accurate, if it gives you that feeling, then it's good literary history. I'm not using

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the word "literary" here as an epithet. It's history as literature, is that right?

*Bruun*: Well, yes. And, if you accept the definition that history should be the reincarnation of the flesh, Carlyle's characters are reincarnated. They live again. You're with them.

*Bryson*: And poor Carlyle, living a very distraught and laborious and harried life, put his very flesh into this. The man's writing was an agony to him and everybody else around him, as we found out afterward when we read his wife's letters.

*Cohen*: Yes, and he put his spirit into it, too. I think it's those two things that preserve a book and keep it alive.

*Bruun*: It does, Mr. Cohen, but I'm still not quite willing to give Carlyle the "E" for effort that you seem to want to offer him.

*Cohen*: Well, you'd give him an "A" for accomplishment, I hope.

*Bruun*: Yes, I'll do that. But, as a historian I'm afraid I can't praise him, because he misread the facts; he misinterpreted characters. He gave them his own marvelous readings, but they were wrong in many cases. He preached his philosophy through history.

*Bryson*: I'm thinking now of the modern reader, Mr. Bruun. Here is a great book. You don't go to this book to know what happened in France at the end of the eighteenth century, but you do go to it, don't you, to know what can happen to men in a great cataclysm of history?

*Bruun*: Yes, you do, and I'm afraid the lesson Carlyle offers, if you take the lesson he offers, is that men after a great cataclysm will turn to Fascism.

*Bryson*: Which they practically always have done!

*Bruun*: Which they often have done! He's a prophet in that respect.

*Cohen*: I think that's somewhat to exaggerate his conclusions. It's to read too much of our own phraseology and recent events into the mere generalities that he includes. But I think that the personal application remains as significant as ever it was.

*Bryson*: Well, he gave us the moral drama at any rate. We ought to be grateful for that.

# Notes and Footnotes

THE ORIGIN OF THE NIBELUNGENLIED, ITS AUTHORSHIP AND CONSTRUCTION OF the poem itself, have been spurs to controversy for centuries. This long Middle-High German epic poem, which relates the story of an evil family possessing an accursed magic hoard of gold, is said to have been derived from the old Scandinavian legends contained in the Volsunga Saga and the Eddas, and handed down to us in its present form by an unknown Austrian or German poet in the early 12th century. Whether its elements are fact or fancy, or a mixture of both have kept scholars searching to this day.

One of the earliest views that gained wide acceptance was the theory advanced by Karl Lachman in his *Kritik der Sage von den Nibelungen*, which purported that the story was originally woven of a myth of the northern gods, counterpointed against historical events, and then refined into a heroic saga after the introduction of Christianity. Richard von Muth lent credence to this view in his *Einleitung in das Nibelungenlied*.

In 1783, Johannes von Muller, a Gottingen scholar, gave short shrift to those views that based the *Nibelungenlied* on legend, calling attention to the historical figures appearing in the poem, identifying Etzel as Attila, Dietrich of Bern as Theodoric of Verona, and the Burgundian kings Gunther, Giselher and Gernôt as the Gundaharius, and Gislahari and Godomar of the Lex Burgundiorum. Supporting this thesis, Julius Liechten, in 1820 declared that "*the Nibelungenlied* rests entirely on historical foundation and that any other attempt to explain it must fail." Although for a great period, Lachmann's views were accepted by a long series of critics, in later years critical opinion sided with the viewpoint of Muller and Liechten, crystallizing in the stand that the story of the Nibelungen was a tradition of real people and actual events however misty or confused in the telling.

The most-widely accepted view held today is that *the Nibelungenlied* is a collection of Franco-Burgundian historical traditions spiced with mythical fancies—revolving around the overthrow of the Burgundian kingdom of Gundahar by the Huns in 436, followed by other episodes, equally historical in their origin, although distorted by chronological impossibility.

GEORG AGRICOLA WAS BORN TO THE BAUER FAMILY IN SAXONY ON MARCH 24, 1490. (The name Agricola is the latinized form of Bauer.) Although recognized as the "father of mineralogy," his early studies were in philology, followed by a degree course in medicine in Italy.

Upon his return to Germany, he settled in Joachimstal, a centre of mining and smelting works, to combine his practice of the healing art with a study of mineralogy—he wanted to test what had been written about metals by the ancients, in the laboratory of practical observation of ores and their treatment.

A widely read treatise of his observations brought him to the attention of Prince Maurice of Saxony, who appointed him historiographer in 1530. In order to widen the range of his studies he moved to Chemnitz, the core of the mining industry. Fourteen years later, Agricola laid the foundations of a physical geology in his *De Ortu et Causis Subterraneorum*.

Prior to the publication of his great work, *De Re Metallica*, Agricola

published a number of works on mineralogy and the discovery and occurrence of metals. *De Re Metallica*, the classic in its field, is a complete and systematic treatise on mining and metallurgy, replete with many fine and interesting woodcuts illustrating the theories.

However noted for his genius in mineralogy, Agricola delved into medical mathematical, theological and historical subjects, publishing at Freiberg what is known as his chief historical work, *Dominatores Saxonici a Prima Origine Ad Hanc Aetatem*. Agricola died at Chemnitz on November 21, 1555.

LITTLE IS KNOWN OF THE EARLY LIFE OF LEONARDO DAVINCI (1452-1519) WHO made his mark in the world as a painter, sculptor, musician, architect, scientist and engineer. He was born in the village of Vinci the natural son of a Florentine petty official and a peasant girl. At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to the workshop of Verrocchio where he came into contact with the most prominent painters of the period.

After studying as an artist in Florence, winning wide admiration for his unfinished *Adoration of the Magi*, DaVinci was called to the court of Lodovico Sforza, where he remained sixteen years. He composed the greater part of his *Trattato della pittura* at the Milanese court of Sforza and the extensive notebooks stand as a monument to his remarkable genius and versatility.

The severe plagues that befell Milan in 1484 drew into play his mastery as a town planner; it was during this period that he worked as a practical engineer remodeling and restoring cathedrals throughout the Tuscany plain.

Leonardo left Milan with the fall of Lodovico in 1499, returning to Florence where he pursued his anatomical studies at the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. In 1502 he became a military engineer in the service of Cesare Borgia. It was in his travels in central Italy studying swamp reclamation projects that he met Machiavelli who became a close friend. Returning to Florence for a brief spell, Leonardo was called to Milan again, this time by the French king Louis XII, to serve as architect and engineer. Continuing his scientific studies, he spent most of his time resolving problems in geology, botany, hydraulics and mechanics.

Attracted by the patronage of Leo X, the Medici pope, Leonardo in 1513 migrated to Rome where he won commissions for several paintings as well as assignments to various architectural projects at the Vatican. After two years in the Holy city, DaVinci, at the invitation of Francis I, of France, settled at the castle of Cloux, where he spent his remaining years pursuing his own researches.

KING LEAR, ONE OF SHAKESPEARE'S GREATEST TRAGEDIES, WAS FIRST PERFORMED AT court in 1606; two slightly different versions found their way into print two years later. The origin of the name Lear is said to be derived from Llyr, the sea-god of the ancient Britons, and it is also identified with the Lir of Gaelic mythology.

Shakespeare discovered the story of *Lear* in the writings of Holinshed, who transcribed it from the *Chronicles* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. The same story was introduced by Spenser in his *Faerie Queene*.

As the play opens, Lear, king of Britain, wishing to retire from the active duties of the throne, decides to apportion his kingdom, among his three daughters, in the same ratio to their love for him. The oldest two, Goneril and Regan, declare their love in no uncertain terms; the third daughter, Cordelia, is more reserved in her demonstration of love, stating that she loves him as is incumbent upon a daughter. The old, petulant Lear is displeased with her answer, and disinherits her, dividing his kingdom among Goneril and Regan, with the proviso that each alternately, month by month, provide him a home,

with a retinue of a hundred knights. After spending the first month with the eldest daughter, Lear moves on to the second daughter's home, where she refuses to entertain his large retinue; Lear balks at entering the home and spends the night buffeted by a wild storm.

Cordelia, who has married the King of France, lands with an Army to restore her father to the throne; she is taken prisoner and is put to death. Goneril, jealous of Regan, poisons her and then takes her own life. Lear, a victim of madness and grief, dies soon after Cordelia's hanging.

Tucker Brooke, in *The Literary History of England* (Appleton-Century-Crofts), calls *Lear* "a study of private selfishness . . . the theme is bourgeois, in spite of the rank of the protagonists; the vices portrayed are mean and the virtues homely. The simplification is extreme; men and women have been stripped of the vestments of culture and even of their formal Christianity. The springs of conduct are laid starkly bare, and the Browningsque moral, 'It's wiser being good than bad,' is cut deeply into this monolithic play."

IN THE PREFACE TO THE MODERN LIBRARY EDITION OF *The Brothers Karamazov* which she translated, Constance Garnett has given the reader in English a clear insight to Dostoyevsky; with it, no reader can miss the shadings of this powerful novel; no one can fail to understand its sweep and meaning.

Miss Garnett points out that Dostoyevsky was the son of a hard working, deeply religious, though poor doctor. So poor in fact that the family of five children lived in two rooms. The father and mother spent their evenings reading aloud to their children, from books of a serious character.

It was while attending the Petersburg School of Engineering, that young Fyodor began his first work, *Poor Folk*.

The poet Nekrassov published the story in his review, and it won wide acclamation. Soon the shy, delicate youth found himself somewhat of a celebrity, with a bright, successful career in his future. His arrest as a revolutionary in 1849 put a blight on his hopes.

"Though neither by temperament nor conviction a revolutionist," Miss Garnett explains that "Dostoyevsky was one of a little group of young men who met together to read Fourier and Proudhon." He was accused of "taking part in conversations against the censorship, and knowing of the intention of setting up a printing press." Condemned to death, he spent eight months in prison, and then one day with twenty-one others was taken out to be shot. Writing to his brother Mihail, Dostoyevsky says: "They snapped swords over our heads, and they made us put on the white shirts worn by persons condemned to death. Thereupon we were bound in threes to stakes to suffer execution. Being the third in the row, I concluded I had only a few minutes of life before me. I thought of you and your dear ones and I contrived to kiss Plestcheiev and Dourrov, who were next to me, and to bid them farewell. Suddenly the troops beat a tattoo, we were unbound, brought back upon the scaffold, and informed that his Majesty had spared us our lives." The sentence was commuted to hard labor. (He was released in 1859).

Grigoryev, one of the condemned men, went mad as soon as he was untied and never regained his sanity.

"The intense suffering of this experience left its lasting mark on Dostoyevsky's mind. Though his religious temper led him in the end to accept every suffering with resignation and to regard it as a blessing in his own case, he constantly recurs to the subject in his writings."

JOHN LOCKE, THE FATHER OF ENGLISH EMPIRICISM, WAS BORN AT SOMERSET IN 1632. He held various academic positions at Oxford University where he was educated. His most important work—perhaps the most important in English

philosophy—was his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Published in 1690, it took him seventeen years to complete. He started the monumental work as a result of a promise he made to a group of friends, during a discussion of morality and religion, and an examination of the questions the understanding of man was qualified to resolve, and those questions which were beyond its powers.

In the *Essay*, Locke attacks the doctrine of innate ideas, maintaining that all our knowledge springs from sensations: all knowledge derives from sense experience and from reflections of that experience.

Eschewing the philosophy of Aristotle, Locke deduced that ideas do not exist in the universal flux, and have no existence apart from the individual concepts from which they are derived. Our will, according to Locke, was absolutely determined by our mind, which is spurred by an inherent desire for beauty and happiness.

Locke is said to have caused much of the skeptical thinking of the following century, being readily traced down to the philosophy of Hume; his theories on the naturalistic source of our knowledge was a fount for the idealism of Kant.

Locke who was a strong advocate of religious liberty died in 1704.

WILLIAM JAMES WAS BORN IN NEW YORK CITY, IN 1842. MOST OF HIS BOYHOOD was spent in study in Europe with his brother, Henry. Son of the Swedenborgian thinker, Henry James, Sr., and a pupil of the painter, W. M. Hunt, James received a thorough grounding in the importance of religion and the arts.

A graduate physician, and professor of physiology and psychology, James announced his philosophic point-of-view during the last decade of his professional life.

James' death in 1910 cut short his work in radical empiricism. The doctrine of Pragmatism, which he in part derived from Charles S. Peirce, was not the sum of James' philosophy, but rather as he put it "the beginning of an introduction to it." *Pragmatism*, which was published in 1907, explored the application of laboratory techniques to the testing of ideas by their reactions in action and feeling; from his studies, James drew the philosophy that an idea has meaning only in relation to its consequences in the world of feeling and action.

WHITNEY J. OATES, PROFESSOR OF THE CLASSICS AT PRINCETON, AND FREQUENT guest on *Invitation To Learning*, in his illuminating introduction to Sophocles in the Modern Library's *Seven Famous Greek Plays* contrasts Sophocles (495 B.C.-405 B.C.) with his contemporaries Aeschylus and Euripides, calling him the great mediating figure between the two.

Oates shows us that whereas Aeschylus' basic orientation was towards theology and religion, and Euripides was mainly interested in human beings, on the human level, and in their psychological attitudes as they face up to the stern realities of life, Sophocles, in a "curious way . . . lies in a mean between these two poets, and seems to combine in himself their outstanding powers." According to Oates, Sophocles is gifted with Aeschylus' broad dimensional insight and Euripides' power of psychological analysis. "He (Sophocles) studies his human characters psychologically in their human environment, and yet he manages to approach the elevation of Aeschylus. He remains on the human level, yet always directs his gaze towards that which is superhuman."

Sophocles' mastery of dramatic technique and genius for expression of the complexities of life with depth, comprehension and clarity, Professor Oates



concludes, "has rarely if ever been equalled in the creative literature of Western Europe."

JEAN RACINE (1639-1699) IS RECOGNIZED AS THE PARAGON OF FRENCH CLASSICISM. His unabiding love for the theatre obliged him to leave the Jansenist school where he was preparing for the priesthood. The influence of the sect's doctrine of original sin, however, made its mark on Racine, and is in evidence in many of his tragedies coupled with the classic Greek concept of Fate.

Although the subjects of most of his dramas were drawn from the tragedies of Euripides, the source of *Athalie*, oftentimes called his greatest dramatic poem, is the Bible. It was written at the behest of Mme. de Maintenon, for performance at the girl's school at Saint Cyr, in 1691, and was not produced professionally in Paris until after his death.

The lack of real appreciation by English-speaking people of Racine has been attributed by many critics to a truism of literary history: that Racine is the most French of French writers. Other critics, taking issue with this theory, point out that the paucity of appreciation is due to the difference of dramatic conception between the classical Tragedy, of which Racine was a master, and the English drama.

RENE DESCARTES (1596-1650), ALTHOUGH PHYSICALLY WEAK, WAS A MAN OF remarkable mental vigour. His ease in mastering mathematics, physics and metaphysics was immediately in evidence at La Flèche, the Jesuit school at which he gained his early education.

Widely travelled, he migrated to Holland in 1628, with the intention of spending his remaining years there. Most of his major works were written in the Lowland country, and it was while living in Utrecht, that he wrote the volume of essays containing the *Discourse on Method*, in 1636.

Descartes was deeply interested in the problem of method—the determination of the right method for obtaining real knowledge by the natural light of reason. The scholastic method, on which he was weaned at La Flèche, was fraught with flaws. Instead of dealing with problems themselves, the scholastic method consisted mainly of citing authorities to resolve problems. Although it called for rigorous study of books, as well as an abundance of ingenuity in reconciling conflicting authorities, it put no premium on independent research or thought. By habit and disposition, Descartes was a thinker rather than a reader. In the *Discourse*, Descartes tells us how dissatisfaction with book-learning came upon him. "I have been nourished on letters since my childhood, and since I was given to believe that by their means a clear and certain knowledge could be obtained of all that is useful in life, I had an extreme desire to acquire instruction. But so soon as I had achieved the entire course of study, at the close of which one is usually received into the ranks of the learned, I entirely changed my opinion. I found myself embarrassed with so many doubts and errors that it seemed to me that the effort to instruct myself had no effect other than the increasing discovery of my own ignorance. And yet I was studying at one of the most celebrated schools in Europe . . . I learned there all that others learned . . . and I did not feel that I was esteemed inferior to my fellow students . . . and this made me take the liberty of judging all others by myself and of coming to the conclusion that there was no learning in the world such as I was formerly led to believe it to be."

In his *Rules*, Descartes maintains that the examination of any problem should not be dominated by what others have thought about it, but purely by what we ourselves can see clearly or infer with certainty. As he explains, "We shall not become mathematicians, even if we know by heart all the

proofs that others have elaborated, unless we have an intellectual talent that fits us to resolve difficulties of that kind. Neither, though we have mastered all the arguments of Plato and Aristotle, if we have not the capacity for forming a solid judgment on these matters, shall we become philosophers."

The term Cartesian is derived from the latinized version of his name, Renatus Cartesius.

CHARLES DARWIN (1809-1882) CAME BY HIS INTEREST IN NATURALISM NATURALLY. His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, in his explanations of organic life, anticipated theories of evolution that were later developed by Charles.

Born in Shrewbury, England, where he received his early education, his father, as his father before him, was a practicing physician. Not wishing to follow in the professional footsteps of his father, Charles left Edinburgh, where he was studying medicine, to enter Cambridge where he began to study for the ministry.

An interest in natural history brought him the position of official naturalist on the S.S. Beagle. His five year tenure on the ship, exploring, observing and correlating information in South America and Australia led to the formulation of his conception of evolution, known as Darwinism. In his *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, he sets forth the structure and substance of this theory.

THE BIRTHDATE OF HERODOTUS, THE FATHER OF HISTORY, IS A QUESTION-MARK in literary annals; best advices put it approximately in 484 B.C., with his death being marked in 425 B.C.

A native of Halicarnassus, it is believed that he was exiled from this Asia Minor city when he took part in the revolutionary overthrow of the tyrant Lygdamis.

His *History* is recognized as the starting point of Western history-writing and a classic in world literature. Although primarily concerned with the Persian Wars, the work abounds with varied stories of the diverse cultures that Herodotus discovered in his travels, as well as notes regarding earlier civilizations.

In contrast to the history of Thucydides, the *History* of Herodotus is less accurate but infinitely broader in scope, incandescent with the charm that belongs to the subjective narrative.

THOMAS CARLYLE WAS BORN IN A SMALL SCOTTISH COMMUNITY OF PEASANT stock, in 1795, six years after the start of the French Revolution, the cataclysm which was to become the subject of his most well-known work. He studied for the ministry at the University of Edinburgh, but left when his inquiring mind filled him with doubts. He turned to the study of law, then to German literature where he was introduced to the transcendental philosophy, and the thought of Kant, Goethe and Fichte. For a while, Carlyle made his livelihood translating and interpreting German romantic thought to English readers.

*The French Revolution* was published in 1837. Carlyle's unmistakable warnings that social reforms were long overdue met a welcome audience. Carlyle sought to apply the lessons of history to the problems of his own day; he studied the revolution as a sociological phenomenon and recorded it as such. His unorthodox approach was rewarded with critical barbs from the colony of scientific and "professional" historians who were blind to his intentions.

That Carlyle's *History* is not factual history will stand unchallenged; that it is vivid, dramatic and certainly a mirror of a mighty struggle will similarly find universal agreement.

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# TROLLOPE

## Orley Farm

ELIZABETH JANEWAY • LIONEL TRILLING • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* When I first began to hear about Trollope—you see, I'm old enough to have started my reading of English novels at a time when Trollope was in eclipse—he was always talked about as the roast-beef-and-ale-novelist, and one got the impression that he didn't know that women existed. But one of the things that struck me was that he was extraordinarily wise and delicate and successful in his handling of women. So it's quite proper to begin this series of discussions of great books about women with a typical Trollope novel. Trollope seems now to be a favorite again.

*Trilling:* Yes, he is, indeed, a favorite again. More and more people are reading him; my students, for example, are extremely enthusiastic about him. And I think you're quite right in saying that this is a typical Trollope novel. It has the range, the leisure, the pace, the extensiveness that we get characteristically in Trollope. I suppose that *Orley Farm* is as good a representation of one variety of womankind as one could get.

*Janeway:* Lady Mason, I think, is a little more than a variety of womankind. She almost surpasses womankind.

*Bryson:* You mean, toward the good or the bad, Miss Janeway?

*Janeway:* I mean toward the good, esthetically. She is handled by Trollope as a really tragic figure. Her fate is tied up with her own personality. It isn't a bad thing that she does—the forging of the will for the sake of her son. The important thing is the nobility by which she finally breaks down at a moment of crisis. When someone is being so kind to her, Sir Peregrine Orme, she simply cannot allow herself to hurt him.

*Bryson:* Lady Mason, briefly, is a woman of rather ordinary origin, who marries a rich merchant forty-five years her elder who had always expected to give his very substantial property to his three children. Unexpectedly they have a son just before he dies. The will

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turns out to have a codicil, in her handwriting, which gives to her infant son Orley Farm—a very small part of the property as a matter of fact. It amounted to eight hundred pounds a year, which was a lot of money in the middle of the nineteenth century, but it wasn't the main property. This now goes to the boy; and twenty years later people begin to suspect that maybe the old man never wrote the codicil that gave it to the boy. Of course, the whole plot is based on the fact that Lady Mason herself forged that codicil. That's practically told in the beginning.

*Janeway*: Yes, it is, and you can see how the plot begins to work because there is an agent of evil, there is a provocateur.

*Bryson*: But the agent of evil had a grievance!

*Janeway*: Did he have a grievance?

*Bryson*: He thought he had.

*Trilling*: All agents of evil have grievances.

*Bryson*: Well, what I mean is that Dockwrath, this rather mean and really despicable attorney—

*Janeway*: Oh, a horrible man!

*Bryson*: Dockwrath really thought, in his distorted imagination, that Lady Mason or Lucius, her son, had been unfair to him in a money deal.

*Trilling*: Well, we're getting ourselves into a very awkward moral situation. This woman is a forger and we're calling the man who exposes her an agent of evil. I think that this must at once point us to consideration of what it is that Lady Mason is. Is she a heroine or is she a villainess?

*Bryson*: Isn't that the fascination of the book, Mr. Trilling? Here's a woman, who, as you strongly suspect—you practically know right from the beginning, if you know anything about novelists—really is guilty of forgery for the sake of her son and who for twenty years has lived on the ill-gotten gains of that forgery. And her son expects her to continue to do so.

*Janeway*: Everybody does!

*Trilling*: No, not everybody. But a good many of the characters admire her.

*Bryson*: Don't you? Don't they know that she has done it?

*Trilling*: They admire her even though they know that she has done it. Yes, I admire her. I don't love her, but I admire her; and I am quite willing to hope that she is never found out.

*Janeway*: It was a very Victorian sin that she committed. It was a sin against property. She stole, in effect. Trollope discusses this. I think he must have thought a great deal about it. But he tends to condemn her less for that Victorian sin against property than for the sin against personality which her crime condemned her to—that she had to live the lie which she had constructed for twenty years. This had an effect which cast her into a mold of hardness that was finally broken only by the fact that old Sir Peregrine Orme fell in love with her and wanted to protect her by marrying her.

*Trilling*: That puts it very well, Mrs. Janeway. And it leads us to a consideration of the personal quality of Lady Mason, which

does, indeed, make her a heroine and not a villainess, but which quite alienates her from our affections. That is, she herself has no possibility of connection with anyone in the book except her son, and even her son is, perhaps through her own doing, in some way alienated from his mother.

*Bryson*: Well, her son is not, Mr. Trilling, a very admirable, and certainly not at all a lovable, character. He's just a somewhat crochety, intelligent young man.

*Janeway*: He's a living stick, you might say. He is a stick but he's alive.

*Bryson*: He's alive and, of course, everything's alive. But, you say that she committed a typical Victorian sin, a sin against property. Didn't she also have a quite typically Victorian motive? She couldn't imagine her precious boy growing up to make his own way in the world. After all, she had enough money for her own needs. She didn't have to have this farm. She didn't have to forge a codicil to a will to take care of herself for those twenty years. She had a small means.

*Janeway*: Well, the boy was only two, and think of how much education meant in a class sense in Victorian England. It would have cast Lucius quite out of the class of society that she had finally made her way into by her marriage.

*Trilling*: It wasn't quite "easy" to make your way into Victorian society if you were a young man without any backing. Another thing that we have to remember is that it was a farm that she got, that is, a land holding, which meant, as Mrs. Janeway implies, so much more then than now. It meant gentility and social establishment.

*Bryson*: So it makes her son sure of being a gentleman in that sense.

*Janeway*: Also it gave him a career, a little more than making him a gentleman. It gave him his life's work.

*Bryson*: As a squire?

*Janeway*: Yes, but a hard-working squire! He was studying very hard.

*Bryson*: That's right! But again, Mrs. Janeway, doesn't this show what is so essentially the Victorian attitude in Trollope himself? We are justified, aren't we, in saying Trollope tends to forgive Lady Mason for this forgery because it was proper for her to want her son to be a gentleman?

*Janeway*: Yes!

*Bryson*: That's the way a mother *ought* to feel about a helpless two-year-old boy. He *should* be protected and brought up as a gentleman. Whereas, wouldn't a mother of today—perhaps I'm being a little too idealistic about this—think that it might be more fortunate for a two-year-old boy to make his own way in the world?

*Janeway*: Well, I don't quite see a two-year-old making his way in the world.

*Bryson*: She could take care of him, but she just couldn't make him a gentleman.

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*Trilling*: Yes. There would have been no public school. There would have been no Oxford. As a matter of fact, he doesn't even go to public school or to Oxford, although he had the opportunity of doing so.

*Janeway*: It would have put a stigma upon him that could never have been removed.

*Bryson*: That's right. But doesn't Trollope sympathize with Lady Mason in wanting to make him a gentleman? That is a motive that he can share, but a motive with which we would not have much sympathy.

*Trilling*: But all novelists must sympathize with their heroines!

*Bryson*: Of course, they do! But what is remarkable about Trollope, what makes Trollope's world so absolutely solid and real, in a way no other novelist can match, is partly this: although he is a little bit objective about the society that he's writing about, he really accepts most of the moral motivations of that society.

*Janeway*: Yes, indeed, he does! He may tend to get a little old-fashioned. I think he rather liked the society which he imagined as being that of twenty or thirty years before the time he was writing. He liked the hang-overs from that period—like Sir Peregrine Orme in this book—a little bit better than he did the overly-ambitious young people whom he describes so well in other books.

*Trilling*: But, that again, I think, is a characteristic of novelists. They always seem to love the generation of the immediate past more than the generation of the present.

*Janeway*: They're always looking for a golden age.

*Trilling*: Almost always. You find it, for example, in most contemporary novelists like Fitzgerald; you find it in Balzac; you find it in Dickens. Dickens was always admiring the landed gentry as against the industrial rising classes. I think you could find it in almost every major novelist, in one form or another.

*Bryson*: Well then, that is not special to Trollope, but there are things special to Trollope, Mr. Trilling, and one of them is this reality. Now, you are both working novelists. I can ask you this question, I think, fairly. If it's discoverable, what's the technical secret of this man? What is it that gives you the feeling, as I've tried to describe it for myself, that you can dip into a Trollope novel as you can visit your grandfather's house.

*Trilling*: Mrs. Janeway works at being a novelist more than I do.

*Janeway*: Well, you can walk into any room of Trollope's house—and I think his work does take on rather this aspect—and feel that it's quite real and that you can go over and kick the furniture.

*Bryson*: Or the people!

*Janeway*: And some of them you want to kick! He had a wonderful ear and he had a wonderful eye. No minor character walks into a room or appears at a hunt meet without establishing himself. It's so real. I don't know what the secret is. I don't know if it is discoverable. Trollope was a very sensitive man. He did not at all

give that impression, but he was. There was one barrier less between him and the world he saw than there is for most people.

*Trilling*: Well, isn't it also a quality of belief as well as of sensitivity? He really believes. I don't mean that in the sense of giving his allegiance, though he does that, too, but in the sense of knowing that these things really are there. For example, the famous iron furniture which appears in this novel is a new invention. It's something that he has seen. He knows its social significance forward and backward. He knows what it means about an industrial age. He knows what a threat it is to the genteel furniture that other people have, made of wood and damask.

*Bryson*: And with hands!

*Trilling*: And with hands, exactly. He knows what a hunt is. He knows what money is. He knows what people live by and on, and he rather loves the whole spectacle. If you take, in addition to his eyes and his sensitivity, the quality of profound committed affection—what I'm calling "belief in"—you don't explain his secret, certainly, but you begin, don't you think, to come toward an explanation?

*Janeway*: Well, Mr. Trilling, when you spoke of his affection, I think you were getting close to another thing, which was that this world, which he wrote about and which he lived in—he certainly did do all the things that crop up in the book—was a world that he almost missed. He had a very odd and unhappy and unfortunate bringing-up with a father who kept drifting off into constructing useless encyclopedias and a mother who wrote for a living—scribble, scribble, scribble—and they had to live out of England part of the time because of lack of money. And when he came back to England he came back in the person of a hobble-de-hoy clerk who shows up again and again in many of Trollope's novels. The world which he achieved, which is this ordinary world that we walk into, is illumined by the enormous desire that he had for it during this long, scraping period of his adolescence and youth, when he almost didn't get there. It has the quality of an achieved happiness.

*Trilling*: That is to say that what is likely to be taken for granted as the commonplace is for Trollope a world of wonder.

*Janeway*: Yes!

*Bryson*: Do you see what you're doing to Trollope?

*Trilling*: Only good, I hope!

*Bryson*: I'm sure it's good, but it's so different from the quite specious picture of Trollope which has been handed down to us. Here's this bluff man who used to get up at five o'clock in the morning and then from five-thirty to eight-thirty he would produce his masterpieces at the rate of two hundred and fifty words per fifteen minutes, and then he'd go out and ride herd on the postal clerks of the nation. I mean literally ride herd on them, because he lived a terrifically busy official life, and he wrote these novels when most men would think he should have been asleep.

*Janeway*: And he hunted!

*Bryson*: He hunted and hunted hard, and he's all beef and ale and robustness and "merry old England"! And now you've described

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him in terms of wistfulness and sensitivity. What's wrong here? Do people have a completely wrong picture of Trollope?

*Janeway*: I wonder how important the picture of any novelist is to the enjoyment of his novels? I suppose that's a false question because it's obvious that the wrong picture of Trollope did in large measure wipe out his popularity.

*Bryson*: For a long time, anyway—and he was partly responsible for it, or, rather, misunderstanding of his autobiography was responsible, wasn't it? Did he really try to make himself a kind of machine of entertainment without sensitivity or without real esthetic purpose when he told about his work habits and brushed aside all ideas of inspiration?

*Janeway*: Perhaps there's an answer to that in the world which he did desire and achieve, the world in which work was becoming increasingly important and in which dilettantism was looked down upon, a world of insurgent industrialism all through England.

*Bryson*: After all, this is the middle of the nineteenth century.

*Trilling*: But, unhappily, the autobiography in which he tells of his prodigious industry came out at a time when literary opinion was likely to be controlled by a view of the author's proper methods of work which condemned the hideous notion that when Trollope had finished one novel in the middle of one of his morning's work, he immediately wrote the title of another and began it. So he alienated public feeling for him.

*Janeway*: Yes, I can see how that could happen.

*Trilling*: And yet I've never understood why that should be so, when you think that these same people adore Flaubert. Flaubert worked hard, but never could get anything very much written.

*Bryson*: I think there's another reason in addition, Mr. Trilling. I'm not disputing his sensitivity or his wistfulness, both of which I think are in his books and in his character; I think they're in his autobiography. But people didn't see it. However, there is one other thing and that is that his art is perfect in the sense of being so perfectly concealed. The apparatus, the way in which he gets his effects is so undiscovered.

*Janeway*: It is so perfectly concealed that at times he enjoys showing it off. He does it in the beginning of *Orley Farm*, if you remember, where he speaks of Lady Mason as not being the heroine, because she is not the young lady to do the love scenes. I forget exactly the way he puts it, but he promises to provide us with a very attractive young lady to do the love scenes.

*Trilling*: Which he does!

*Janeway*: In the opening of other novels he takes you behind the scenes for a minute—and I know no one who has done it more charmingly—and gives you a little insight into the technical feeling that an author has as he begins a book.

*Trilling*: Well, isn't that something you find endemic through the nineteenth century, perhaps almost until the time of Flaubert—that is, the sense that the novelist is playing this wonderful game of writing a novel?

*Janeway*: Yes!

*Trilling*: Here I am, he says, pretending that I'm creating a world. I am creating a world. We know it's not real, and yet it's going to have the effect upon you of reality, and what a magician I am to be able to do that! Now, Flaubert comes along and says the artist is a priest and that he must not be personal at the mysteries he is celebrating, or that the artist is a scientist and that he must be perfectly objective and impersonal and must never disclose his hand. But the great novelists up to Flaubert all said: "I am a novelist, I am telling you a tale. I'm going to enchant you out of existence." And, as you say, I think that nobody does it more charmingly than Trollope.

*Bryson*: Do you think it was mostly a literary convention, this taking the reader into the author's confidence?

*Janeway*: Yes!

*Trilling*: I think most of the novelists used the cliché of "Dear Reader."

*Janeway*: Yes, "Reader, I married him." Do you remember that at the end of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*?

*Bryson*: Well, he said that he was writing for money, which he did, didn't he? And he obviously wrote for peoples' entertainment as much as any great novelist ever did; he wanted people to have a good time reading his books. What else? What was he after? Did he have a philosophy of life. Did he have a moral view that he wanted to put across? Did he have a judgment on society? I'm not insisting that he should.

*Trilling*: How can a man be a novelist and not have a judgement on society?

*Bryson*: I don't know. I'm asking you.

*Trilling*: I don't mean to throw the question back at you. I think it's impossible for anyone to go creating life without making judgments of one kind or another, whether implicitly or explicitly, and most of Trollope's judgments are explicit. Thus, in this book he becomes a crusader for a kind of legal propriety and legal justice which quite haunts him through the whole work.

*Bryson*: As a matter of fact, we've said very little about one of the things that this book is most about, and that is the extraordinary intricacies of the legal case, and the question whether or not Lady Mason should be punished. We all know she's guilty. But the way the various lawyers and various attorneys played around, got in each other's way, and accused each other of all kinds of things—this is important—and the evil one finally got his come-uppance, as he should.

*Janeway*: Yes! Yes, Trollope, I think, created in Orley Farm a whole of starlings and an exultation of larks—or of lawyers. He had a whole flock of lawyers, at any rate, as many lawyers as he had clergymen in the Barchester novels. You have Judge Snavelly at one end.

*Bryson*: And Mr. Dockwrath, who's terrible, at the other.

*Janeway*: He's awful!

*Trilling*: There's Solomon.

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*Janeway*: And Felix Graham!

*Bryson*: Yes, and the actual hero in the love scene is the young lawyer. Yet these people, these lawyers, are part of the reality—one never says “background” in Trollope—because they’re always in round, they’re always fully real. Is that as true now? Does one have to be interested in literary history to read Trollope?

*Trilling*: Oh, certainly not! I mean, the enormous, increasing vogue of Trollope would disprove that.

*Bryson*: You say your students want to read him?

*Trilling*: My students, who ten years ago would have thought that he was something perfectly alien from them, now think he’s very impressive.

*Bryson*: Do you mean they read him for fun?

*Trilling*: Well, they read him under assignment, and then they have fun. That’s what the teaching of literature means, I suppose. I am inclined to think that possibly one explanation for this increased popularity is the solidity, the firmness, of the society that Trollope represents to us. It’s a society in reasonable conflict, but it looks solid; it looks sound. It looks as if it were going to endure in a way that we feel is Utopian, and that in part draws people. The sense of the social connections that exists there—for example, the importance of the lawyers in this book, which you mentioned, the fact that Trollope was interested and expected his readers to be interested in the working of the law, and in the various legal techniques that could be used—all this implies to me a kind of reticulation of society that we don’t have now.

*Bryson*: And it’s a spectacle, Mr. Trilling?

*Trilling*: Oh, it’s an enormous spectacle, and I suppose when you have a human spectacle of that kind you have a society that is at peace.

*Janeway*: Don’t we have just a little more than that, though? I think you have a sense of the eternal and never-changing relationships between people, various but always going on. That is part of the secret of how contemporary Trollope seems.

*Bryson*: Of course, it isn’t only that. It’s the fact that, as Trollope himself would have said, “these are wonderful stories, I’m writing about people that you love and hate and have fun with.” After all, that’s what novels are mainly for.



# THE BIBLE

## *Ruth and Esther*

SIMON GREENBERG • VIRGILIA PETERSON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Those of us who were brought up in the ordinary American household, I think, remember Ruth and Esther as very romantic stories. I thought of Esther as a great heroine. I remember singing lustily in a cantata chorus about hanging somebody on a gibbet fifty cubits high, all of which was somehow celebrating Esther's beauty. And I remember Ruth as a model of wifely devotion and heroism. Now I know that these books are very much more than that. They are deeply involved in the Jewish tradition of festival and of history. But, I'm a little bit puzzled as to just whether Esther is to be taken as history, as great fiction, or as fable?

*Greenberg:* First, there's the problem of whether the festival should be called a festival in the ordinary sense of the word.

*Bryson:* The Purim?

*Greenberg:* There's discussion in Jewish sources about whether it really is a festival of the saints, such as Passover, or New Year's or the Day of Atonement.

*Bryson:* But you do celebrate it, don't you?

*Greenberg:* We celebrate it. It's a day of hilarity, of fun, of release of emotions, rather than of solemnity or sacredness or holiness. So, when you think of the word "festival" in connection with Purim you think of it rather in terms of "festivities" that we associate, in our environment here, with Halloween, rather than with a solemn occasion.

*Peterson:* To my mind, Esther is one of those narratives which illustrate what happened between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's the kind of story that Voltaire picked out to illustrate how cruel the Bible stories were, and how impossible they were to fit in with our present morality. Voltaire delighted in using the Book of Esther as an illustration. As a matter of fact, it has all the virtues, except that it has this terrible theme of revenge. And it is

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the theme of revenge, which, although it exists in people's hearts, has gone out of acceptance as morality and can no longer be justified.

*Bryson:* We would no longer, Miss Peterson, think it an occasion of yearly festivity to consider slaughtering thousands of people and hanging somebody fifty cubits high, would we?

*Peterson:* Eight hundred people in the capital and seventy-five thousand in the provinces—but no scholar admits that that could be true.

*Bryson:* I suppose that that couldn't be true. I would defer to Dr. Greenberg on that. This is the romantic story of the Jewish maiden who was taken into the household of the Persian king during the captivity. She was the ward of her Uncle Mordecai, who was also fighting for political power. And, because she finds favor in the eyes of the king, the Jews are saved and go out and slaughter their enemies. That's about the scenario, isn't it? Did any such thing ever happen?

*Greenberg:* Well, to the best of our present scholarship, it never happened in the way it is related in the Bible today. That there was officer high in the council of the kings who would have wanted to destroy the Jews of Persia, I think we can assume.

*Bryson:* And Haman is as good a name for him as any?

*Greenberg:* Exactly! Haman became the exemplar of a long, long tribe of similar individuals. The festivity of the occasion lies not in the slaughtering, but in the fact that the Jews were saved. I imagine that this kind of festival was one of the ways that a people who never had any opportunity of revenging themselves really during a period of more than two thousand years just gave vent to their emotions once a year. It was what they would like to have done rather than what they did.

*Bryson:* But primarily it is the story of a woman, isn't it? It's the story of Esther.

*Peterson:* Well, it started when the king had a banquet of all the eminent men of a newly conquered region, and he sent for his wife to come and show off her beauty; and she said in elegant words she'd be darned if she would. Whereupon he had her banished and announced that her defiance of his order would uproot the morals of all the houses of his whole kingdom and that men would be disgraced if his wife took to disobeying him.

*Bryson:* But no husband could expect to be obeyed if the queen could disobey the emperor. I rather admire that. But note, Miss Peterson, he didn't banish her or depose her from her queenhood until he had consulted all the wise men of the kingdom. They all agreed.

*Greenberg:* He did more than just banish her. I think something much more serious than that happened.

*Bryson:* Well, he got rid of her. He liquidated her. And then he went out to find the most beautiful virgin in his kingdom and she turned out, without his knowing it, to be the Jewish girl Esther, Mordecai's niece. What kind of a girl was Esther? Beautiful, no doubt.

*Peterson:* Extremely obedient, extremely humble, always following Mordecai's advice. She went in for her final presentation to

Ahasuerus for the post of queen, so to speak, without the fine raiment and without all the wiles of the other competitors.

*Bryson:* She surprised him by simplicity.

*Peterson:* By extreme unpretentiousness.

*Bryson:* Was that just cleverness, Miss Peterson? Was that the final touch of the real coquette?

*Peterson:* In the beginning one wouldn't have thought it was cleverness, but she does show a great streak of diplomacy later on. When she finds out that Haman has done the dreadful thing and gotten an edict from the King to have all the Jews slaughtered, and when Mordecai insists that she should risk her life by going to Ahasuerus and asking him to withdraw this edict, she's very clever. She goes and he lifts the scepter which is a sign that she may approach him and then she says, "Won't you come to a banquet with Haman? Won't you come to my house for dinner?" That's pretty clever and even that first time when they go there for dinner she doesn't ask what she wants. She says "will you come another night, my lord?" With great humility there, I think she's being masterfully diplomatic.

*Greenberg:* I believe we have missed the point that the story in the Bible wants to make in telling us that Esther did not make use of all of the opportunities given her for beautifying herself. It was not a matter of diplomacy, but to indicate that, despite the fact that she didn't eat the food that was given her—which would perhaps make her heavy and therefore less attractive—the Almighty was there protecting her, and that He, through His mercy and grace, bestowed upon her a beauty that the ordinary activities and the ordinary foods and perfumes, which were at her disposal, would not have given her.

*Bryson:* You see, Miss Peterson, it makes so much difference how you read a story like this. If you read it as a Biblical teaching, then the fact that God is not mentioned in it becomes significant—and isn't it true it's the only book in the Bible in which God is not mentioned?

*Greenberg:* He is not mentioned specifically.

*Bryson:* But the *presence* of God is here, and Providence is what made her beauty prevail against all the other candidates for the King's favor. If you read it as literature, then you can attribute to this woman her humility, and her very firm courage in trying to help her people. Certainly, she deserves some credit, Dr. Greenberg, for the fact that she was willing to risk her life for her people. It isn't only the intervention of God's Providence.

*Greenberg:* No doubt of that. It is typical of all of great religion, and certainly of Judaism, that man has some credit for the good that comes into the world. God isn't the only one that's responsible for the good.

*Peterson:* I know that Racine considered her an example of extraordinary piety. He had to make up a play for the young girls in the boarding school of Saint Cyr and he set to work and wrote the story of Esther—omitting, of course, what she asked for in the way of revenge, and omitting the hundred-and-eighty-day banquet and all that. It makes a very charming, lovely play—without tragic over-

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tones, but with great beauty and devotion and piety, and with a chorus of Esther's friends, the Jewesses, joining in. It's a beautiful little piece, and it was performed by the girls. Even the King was a girl, and Racine then says in a preface that it was all right because in those days the girls and the men both wore long dresses.

*Greenberg*: I'd like to say just one word about this theme of revenge that comes up so constantly.

*Peterson*: I think you'd better.

*Bryson*: You'd better, Dr. Greenberg, because it disturbs a modern person to know that the Jews, having been relieved from slaughter, went out and slaughtered everybody else.

*Greenberg*: It disturbs not only the modern person, it disturbed many people in the past as well. When you read that story carefully you'll find that that chapter on the revenge isn't part of the integrated plot. The whole story has a very carefully woven plot. There isn't a detail in it that doesn't fit into some scheme. But the tail end of the story, asking for another day of revenge, doesn't fit into the picture at all; and many a scholar—and most of them, I would say—would agree today that that's a later addition.

*Peterson*: Well, the first day of revenge was bad enough.

*Bryson*: You think it's symbolic? It's a vicarious revenge that people of later times added to the story in order to discharge their own feelings against oppression? What's the religious significance of that, Dr. Greenberg?

*Greenberg*: No religious significance that I can see, except the fact that God was there to protect His people, and that He used a channel for their protection that no human being at the time could have foreseen. The fact that Esther became the Queen had no relationship at the time when she became Queen with what happened later on. You'll find repeatedly in the Bible that events so shaped themselves that the purposes of God are fulfilled without the actors themselves knowing that they are actors in a great drama. The same thing, for example, happened in the story of Joseph. Joseph, sold into slavery, later interprets his own career as the hand of God guiding him so that he may be the protector of his people when the years of hunger came.

*Bryson*: The character of Esther is interesting because she was one of appealingly human people who are the carriers of God's will, the instruments of Providence, without really knowing quite what they're doing except that they're doing what their consciences and sense of righteousness makes them do.

*Greenberg*: Exactly!

*Bryson*: What about Ruth?

*Peterson*: Well, Ruth is the prototype of passionate devotion. Ruth is the story of utter oneness of heart and motive. Ruth is the author of that extraordinary quotation: "I go whither thou goest, and whither thou lodgest I lodge." It's unbelievable to me that she said it to her mother-in-law. One really ought to remind people of that. The much maligned figure, the mother-in-law, in the case of Naomi

must really have been a very lovable person, indeed, to evoke all that devotion from Ruth.

*Bryson*: It's striking, too, isn't it, Miss Peterson, that Ruth is not a Jewish woman. Ruth is a Moabite. Ruth is the non-Jewish wife of a Jewish man driven out of Palestine by famine, by destitution, going somewhere else, and marrying there. After her husband's death, Ruth decides to go back to his people with her mother-in-law. Now, the devotion is a Moabitish devotion to a Jewish family connection. Does that make it any more interesting?

*Peterson*: Well, I think perhaps it does. Especially if you remember she had a chance to go home to her own parents, to what she was used to, and she turned it down.

*Greenberg*: She was more than urged to go back, you know, and to remain with her own people. Her sister-in-law did go back home. This has been interpreted as indicative of the universalistic spirit that the book breathes in all of its passages. There is no sense of racial isolationism of any kind, and the fact that a Moabite woman is made the ancestress of King David is, of course, the amazing thing in itself.

*Bryson*: And in the New Testament that makes a Moabitish woman the ancestress of Jesus, the ancestress of Jesus of Nazareth.

*Greenberg*: That's right!

*Bryson*: So you have this story, in spite of our beliefs that the Jews of the Old Testament are almost always and fiercely exclusive. Is this historical? Is this another, shall we call it, historical novel?

*Greenberg*: Well, there is part history, and part folk lore. But the un-historical thing is that the Jews of the Old Testament were fiercely exclusive.

*Bryson*: They weren't?

*Greenberg*: Not at all!

*Bryson*: All right! I was careful about that. I said we *think* of the Jews of the Old Testament as being exclusive. After all, the Moabites did not worship the Jewish God.

*Greenberg*: No!

*Bryson*: This woman, Ruth, came from an idolatrous tribe. She was brought in only by marriage. She chose to go home with the Jewish mother-in-law. She found a Jewish husband in Boaz and that made her an ancestress of David.

*Peterson*: Paul Claudel has written a book about Ruth.

*Bryson*: The French poet?

*Peterson*: He and an abbe, who is now dead, wrote a book interpreting the Book of Ruth according to the Catholic mysticism in which Naomi, the mother-in-law, represents the perfection of faith and Ruth represents the faith going toward perfection, while the other sister-in-law, who went home to her parents and did not follow Naomi, represents faith which had not the capacity to reach perfection, and Boaz himself is God.

*Bryson*: Then, what Ruth was doing was recognizing righteousness and a true God, leaving her own people and moving into a religious community that she felt was closer to truth. Is that the Jewish interpretation?

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*Greenberg:* Well, once you begin to allegorize you can do almost anything with any story in the Bible. But Ruth has not been allegorized in that way in any of the Jewish traditions. The book that has been allegorized most along those lines, both in the Christian and the Jewish tradition, is the *Song of Songs*. Of course, unless you do allegorize that book you find it rather difficult to explain its inclusion in the Bible. But the story of Ruth is taken as straight history in the Jewish tradition—as indicative of the ethical and moral qualities of an individual that is loyal to a memory, loyal to a manner of living, which, in this case, is represented by her Jewish mother-in-law, who is interested in the welfare of her daughter-in-law.

*Bryson:* She is very much concerned with Ruth, isn't she?

*Peterson:* Well, it's better she had be because it seems there is a great difference between the Old Testament and the modern world in the sense that women really suffered almost intolerable humiliation in those days. Just because Naomi's husband died and because her daughter-in-law's husbands died and she was left without sons or husband, she and her daughter had to go and just beg and scrape around; and their position wasn't redeemed until Ruth was taken in by Boaz.

*Bryson:* Boaz had to extend a hand of kindness. She could claim nothing. Ruth had to glean in the field, and she was allowed to glean. She had to lie at his feet. She had to supplicate.

*Peterson:* Real humility and humiliation.

*Bryson:* But he, out of kindness, took her in.

*Greenberg:* I'd like to differ with that interpretation. I think you're unfair to the society of which these two women were a part. What happened to Naomi was what can happen in any society when a wealthy individual loses his wealth. She simply didn't have anything whereby to support herself; and the action of Boaz, in permitting her to glean, was not a great favor on his part. The law of the Bible makes it a *right* of the poor person to come into the field of the rich during harvest, and the things that are left behind *belong* to the poor individual as of right.

*Bryson:* But this was his relative!

*Peterson:* Yes, and when Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem-Judah all the people said, "Oh, yes, do you remember how wonderful your life used to be?" And Naomi beats her bosom and says: "Yes, and now I am absolutely barren. Now, I am empty of everything because I have no men left." It was as if it were a Divine punishment. They treated disaster as Divine punishment in those days. They were being punished because she had lost her husband and her sons.

*Greenberg:* Well, how would any woman feel who, in a short period of time, would lose her husband, her sons, and her wealth?

*Peterson:* I'm not saying it isn't a tragedy. I'm only commenting on the difference of attitude. We would not feel that such a woman was disgraced and she would not feel she was disgraced.

*Greenberg:* She didn't say she was disgraced.

*Bryson:* The manners are difficult to understand, Dr. Green-

berg, according to which these women have to seem to be beggars, when they are actually related to people who have very great wealth. Boaz, after all, is their kinsman, and he's rich.

*Greenberg*: But he didn't know about this. You see, he didn't know who Ruth was when she was in her field. The first time he meets her, you remember, he has to ask the young men, "Who is this girl?" And they tell him who she is. And once he finds out the relationship he treats her differently. The men are ordered to be particularly kind to her and considerate of her.

*Bryson*: Well, now, explain this to me, Dr. Greenberg. Let me ask you a direct question. Let me go back to this point which seems very interesting about Ruth. We have always thought of the Jews of the Old Testament as exclusive. Here the Jews deliberately keep within their own sacred books a story which shows that the ancestor of David—the ancestor of the Messiah by the Jewish tradition as well as by the Christian—was a Moabitish woman, an idolatress who embraced the Hebrew religion. Why did they keep that? Because certainly in the latter days they were more exclusive.

*Greenberg*: The exclusiveness of Judaism is, I think, one of the most unfortunate of popular beliefs about Judaism.

*Bryson*: It isn't true?

*Greenberg*: It is not true! A person who was willing to do as Ruth said she was willing to do—"Thy people will be my people; thy God my God"—was always accepted. The reason for the common opinion is because of a story in the days of Ezra when there was a great moral, religious, and ethical degeneracy among the community that came to settle in Jerusalem. Ezra, considering whether he was wise or not in doing it, knew something very radical had to be done, and he compels the people to give up their foreign wives. That story has left an impression even until today. The fact is, anybody can join the Jewish religion.

*Peterson*: Well, Ruth still stands in everybody's mind as a figure of terrific grief and humiliation being unjustly imposed on. Even Keats, when he writes about the nightingale, says that perhaps also the same song of the nightingale "found a path through the sad heart of Ruth when, sick for home, she stood in tears amid the alien corn."

*Greenberg*: He is wrong!

*Bryson*: She is no longer alien?

*Greenberg*: He is reading something into that story that doesn't belong there. There is no humiliation in Ruth at all. There is merely the stress of great woe and sorrow and personal loss, but not humiliation in the sense that you would take it.

*Bryson*: So that, in the case of both Esther and Ruth, we have women who managed their own fates with a heroism which we don't ordinarily attribute to people so ancient.

AUSTEN

## *Pride and Prejudice*

ORVILLE PRESCOTT     •     JAN STRUTHER     •     LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: The first great woman novelist in English turned out to be the woman novelist most popular, I should think, up to your time, Miss Struther. Jane Austen, as an author, seems to elicit from her readers either intense dislike or a worshipful idolatry. Yet she's not a very passionate person; she's not a person who talks very much about causes.

*Prescott*: I think, Mr. Bryson, that we know, when we read anything that Jane Austen ever wrote, that we are in the presence of one of the nicest, one of the wittiest, one of the most intelligent women who ever lived.

*Bryson*: That sounds as if you were one of those readers who reacted with enthusiasm, Mr. Prescott.

*Prescott*: I love Jane Austen.

*Bryson*: Not Elizabeth Bennett.

*Prescott*: And I'm very fond of Elizabeth Bennett, who is the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*.

*Bryson*: What would you say was the character of Miss Austen's popularity? Am I describing it badly, Mr. Prescott, when I say that everybody reacts either with great affection or with kind of distaste? Is that an exaggeration?

*Prescott*: I don't know whether we can really tell, Mr. Bryson. Maybe some people are left lukewarm. But certainly she has held a faithful following, as few writers in the history of the world have.

*Bryson*: For about a century and a half now.

*Prescott*: That's right. And it's because people not only enjoy her books, but are fond of the woman who wrote them. That is very rare in literature. We admire ever so many writers in their works, not thinking about the author, or sometimes even realizing that we couldn't abide the author.

*Bryson*: You mean there's some quality in the character of Jane Austen, the woman, that seems to shine through the books.



*Prescott*: I think so.

*Bryson*: But not self-consciously, not insistently.

*Prescott*: Not a bit. It's entirely accidental that it's there.

*Struther*: I think it is true that people tend to react either with worshipful idolatry or distaste, but there are some lukewarm ones.

*Bryson*: I've never met one, Miss Struther.

*Struther*: Well, I'm afraid, Mr. Bryson, you're sitting right next to one now.

*Bryson*: You mean that you are a lukewarm admirer of Jane Austen.

*Struther*: I am. A thunderbolt will probably come and strike me this minute, but I am slightly lukewarm—a little warmer than that. I was given *Pride and Prejudice* by my mother, along with ninety-nine other books which she felt I, at least, ought to have read when I was twelve. I read it then with great enjoyment, very great enjoyment. I reread it some years later with slightly less enjoyment, and I reread it a couple of weeks ago with, I must admit, some difficulty.

*Bryson*: What you're suggesting, Miss Struther, is that some people grow up and some don't. And those who don't grow up continue to love Jane Austen.

*Prescott*: I would say that was the vilest heresy I ever heard. The nice thing about Jane Austen is the quality of the people who like her. They all are intelligent, attractive people, with senses of humor and a realization that writers can be significant and moving and interesting when they write about the daily affairs of ordinary people—not involved in major crises. And I think that's a nice, healthy way to look at books and life.

*Struther*: But do you think the converse is true, that people who aren't so keen on Jane Austen must be perfectly horrible because, if so, I'll see you outside.

*Prescott*: I don't think that necessarily follows, but it is a black mark against them.

*Struther*: Oh dear!

*Bryson*: I think there are some people, of which Miss Struther is quite definitely not one, Mr. Prescott, who just dislike Jane because they're tired of hearing other people talk about her. But there's a great deal more to say about her than that she's popular, because she's admired as well as loved, and some authors would rather be admired than loved. She occupies a certain place. This is the first book about women—the men are more or less incidental in this book, except for Darcy, the hero, if you can call him that—by a woman who writes about woman's affairs. It's a kind of a woman's world, isn't it?

*Struther*: I don't think I agree.

*Bryson*: You're disagreeing about everything, Miss Struther.

*Struther*: I am. I think the male characters are just as well drawn as the women characters.

*Bryson*: Oh yes, but they're scenery in a woman's world, Miss Struther.

*Struther*: No, I don't agree. Mr. Darcy is the most important character in the book, other than Elizabeth Bennett. Those two char-

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acters are the only two in the book who are drawn in the round, and who develop. The rest are stereotypes—very amusing, but stereotypes.

*Prescott*: Your remark about the feminine point of view is rather significant, Mr. Bryson. I think we should emphasize that this is one of the first books ever written entirely from a woman's point of view. No man is ever portrayed except as the heroine sees him and thinks about him. And this provides a sort of unity of impression which is customary in many books today, but had never been done before, as far as I know, at that time. After all, this book was published in 1813 and written in 1797. It was a great achievement.

*Bryson*: When the girl was only twenty.

*Prescott*: She first wrote it when she was twenty.

*Struther*: I think it's a wonderful achievement. It's a pioneering job, but I don't think that one need want to read it and reread it just because it was a wonderful pioneering job. Pioneers are always followed by settlers, and I personally prefer to read some of the books that were written by the people who settled on that pioneered land.

*Prescott*: Well, we should know about *Pride and Prejudice's* pioneering quality as a fact in the history of literature, and then we should go on to reread it, if we get the intense pleasure out of it that so many people do.

*Bryson*: Let's look at it for a moment, Mr. Prescott, as a book about a subject. This world which, as you say, is described entirely from a woman's point of view is a world which to most people today is faintly comic.

*Prescott*: Well, this is a book about the social life of a group of rural gentry, in the time of the Napoleonic wars—and the amusing thing is that the wars are never mentioned—and also about a time when England was being swept by a wave of social snobbery unprecedented in English history. Anyone with either wealth or aristocratic connections was much more important than it's possible for us to understand easily today.

*Bryson*: And everybody in the book takes those distinctions of wealth and birth quite seriously.

*Prescott*: They looked up to wealth and social rank the way we now look up to generals.

*Struther*: Generals or intellectuals, people of intellectual ability. I think that Elizabeth Bennett in the book accepted the values of the time, but she didn't like it when they were accompanied by arrogance and snooty behavior, as they were in the case of Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

*Bryson*: Let's go back and remind ourselves that this is a book of a woman, one of five daughters, whose mother wasn't well-to-do but very conscious of social position and of the necessity for marrying all the girls well. The most brilliant and attractive of these daughters, Elizabeth Bennett, meets Mr. Darcy, who is a very wealthy, very high-placed, very arrogant young man. I've never been quite sure who was proud and who was prejudiced. I remember that the first title of the book was "First Impressions," wasn't it?

*Struther*: Yes, that's right.

*Bryson*: In other words, one shouldn't trust first impressions. I've always supposed that Mr. Darcy was proud and Miss Bennett was prejudiced.

*Prescott*: I think that's what Miss Austen meant you to conclude.

*Bryson*: Well, Mr. Darcy's pride was in his position, which everybody accepted as a reason for pride; but he was too proud; he was too arrogant. And when he practically insulted her the first time they met, because of what he thought was her inferior social position, she took it to heart. Now, is the story there that snobbery is all right, provided it's tempered by good manners?

*Prescott*: I don't think that's quite what Jane Austen meant. She meant that the pride of Darcy was somewhat excessive, although it was justified not only by his wealth and social position, but by the fact that, when you got to know him, you realized he was a good and virtuous and generous man.

*Bryson*: But pride is not a characteristic of a good man.

*Prescott*: It isn't, but he had qualities of character which the heroine failed to see because her first impressions were faulty—at least, that's the point of the book. I find the early impression of Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* the least sympathetic part of the book. He seems so intolerable that it's hard to realize that he is as good as he's later portrayed.

*Bryson*: For a long time he goes on being intolerable. He practically insults poor Elizabeth the first time he proposes to her.

*Struther*: "Practically"! He certainly does insult her, Mr. Bryson. I think, personally, that one of the best things in the book is the sentence in which pride and vanity are compared by Mary, the middle sister, who was very stuffy and priggish. But this was good. "Vanity and pride are different things; though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us." Don't you think that's good?

*Bryson*: Yes. It's extremely good.

*Struther*: Mr. Darcy had both pride and vanity, but he ended up by having only pride. I think that he learned. His character developed throughout the book. Miss Austen's point of view is that pride is all right, but that vanity is not all right.

*Prescott*: We should also remember that this is a love story and a social comedy. It shows how a love story had to be worked out when social conventions were much different from those we know today. You have to make an adjustment to see how things developed then and what customs they would accept. In that way the book is extremely interesting.

*Bryson*: Of course it is, Mr. Prescott, but it's interesting for far more than its value as a historical document, as you, yourself, said. As a matter of fact—let me be on Jane's side now for a moment—do you think she admired very much the excessive snobbishness of her time?

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*Prescott*: No, I don't. I think she realized it was there. What she really admired was virtuous conduct, and she liked it best when it was combined with humor and good manners.

*Struther*: Didn't she say, "I dearly love a laugh"?

*Prescott*: I believe so.

*Bryson*: That's one of the things Mr. Prescott loves her for. What did you mean by saying that Darcy and Elizabeth Bennett are characters "in the round," and the others are rather flat? What do you mean by that, Miss Struther? Mr. Bennett isn't flat.

*Struther*: No, Mr. Bennett is not. I was going to correct myself.

*Bryson*: Poor little man, driven into the corner constantly by five daughters and a scheming wife.

*Struther*: Yes, but he was rather naughty. He did make fun of the mother in front of the daughters, didn't he?

*Prescott*: And he's a subject of satire, too. Jane Austen is pretty severe to him because he resigned. He abdicated from his responsibility for being a good husband or a good father.

*Struther*: He did. But I think it was the only way he could possibly endure life at all.

*Prescott*: Oh, I think he could have put up a battle.

*Bryson*: Put up a battle against those five girls and that terrible wife he had, Mr. Prescott?

*Prescott*: Yes. I don't think we should surrender in life, and I don't think Jane Austen thought he should have. She's quite severe with Mr. Bennett, although she loves his humor, as we all do.

*Bryson*: I think she's affectionate. Do you think that the other personages stay as sort of flat characters, too? Does Miss Austen concentrate on the chief people and let the others fall into types?

*Prescott*: There's some truth in that, but I wouldn't put it quite so sharply. She certainly gives most of her attention to Elizabeth and Darcy. But the minor characters, most of whom are satirized, humorously, seem to me very real. She just hasn't time or inclination to develop them so fully, but they're equally live. I believe in them as much.

*Bryson*: There's something miraculous about this book, whether you like it or not, when you think of the kinds of women which had been depicted by the "great guns" (as Scott referred to himself) previous to this, and the very slight attempts that had been made for women to write at all and the rather sorry attempts that most men had made to write about women. Here's a woman who creates a world as nobody else did. Whether you like it or not, it's a real world and it's full of real people. What does that for me is not only the realism of the book, but a kind of pervasive wit, a kind of neatness and directness of epithet and way of expressing herself which would make it almost impossible not to recognize a passage out of Jane Austen wherever you ran across it. It's a very, very finished and complicated style for so young a person.

*Prescott*: It's a reflection of her lovely humor. She can look at people and be rather malicious about them and yet not mean. She sees their faults and takes them off so neatly and with such lovely

humor! There's the most famous sentence she ever wrote, the first one in *Pride and Prejudice*. It's so delicious that it's always being quoted: "It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Now, that's number one in the philosophy of nearly all women, still.

*Struther*: Yes, that's a good one. And there's a very good description of Mr. Collins, very succinctly put, when he first arrived.

*Bryson*: Isn't that characteristic, Miss Struther, of every one of her descriptions? She places her people on the stage—with great deftness and accuracy, always with a little malice. She never seems to fail to be amused. May I say that, to me, there's always something of the too intelligent spinster about Jane.

*Prescott*: Oh, I would deny that furiously!

*Bryson*: You deny everything.

*Prescott*: Jane Austen's perfection. Wouldn't the world be better if any of us were as intelligent as this spinster?

*Bryson*: Oh yes.

*Prescott*: It's because she always looks at things from a comic point of view.

*Bryson*: Isn't that partly because she's disengaged from life?

*Prescott*: I don't think so. I think she is intensely living and absorbed in the affairs of her friends and relations in her real life and equally absorbed in her imaginary characters.

*Bryson*: Not in herself though? Did Jane Austen live at all, in any real sense?

*Prescott*: Oh yes. She was deeply in love with a man and would have married him, except that he died, and she refused another proposal—which would have given her rank and wealth. But she didn't have the face to do it, because she didn't believe a woman should marry without love.

*Bryson*: I was thinking of this time, not her later ventures, when she was what we would call—although in those days it wasn't called that—a mere girl of twenty.

*Prescott*: A very marriageable woman in those days.

*Struther*: Yes. I don't think that you can say that she'd never had any life by then. I mean, twenty wasn't very old to be unmarried, was it?

*Bryson*: It wasn't old at all, really. Perhaps I'm not expressing this quite as I would like to. I don't mean that she hadn't had experience. She probably had had all the experiences which any respectable girl of twenty in that society could possibly have had. What I'm thinking about is her attitude. She could have gone through six marriages, five tragic experiences and several fortunes—to me, Jane Austen could—and still have been just as remote from life as she was at this age of twenty. I don't think life ever really touched her. She was too amused by it. She was too disengaged.

*Struther*: Oh, I see what you mean. Yes.

*Bryson*: She never committed herself to anything. I think she could have been quite lovable, Mr. Prescott. But, I imagine that, if you had been fortunate enough to have lived one hundred and fifty

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years ago and had got Jane for yourself, she'd have broken your heart.

*Prescott*: I think that I would have been so depressed, trying to live up to her wit and her charm, that my heart might have been broken by my sense of humility. But I don't think that she was detached from life. Isn't that a conclusion you draw just because she has deliberately chosen to write comic novels, rather than tragic ones or passionate ones?

*Bryson*: No, I don't think so.

*Prescott*: Comedy is not a real detachment. It's just one way of looking at the human struggle.

*Bryson*: Quite right. I don't mean that humorists are detached people, necessarily. They often are not. I could name some who seem to me to be deeply involved in their own lives, as well as in the lives of others. No, it's something else about Jane, which doesn't make her less charming to me—that isn't the point. It seems to me to be one of her characteristics—that she doesn't really give life anything; she just takes from it these wonderful insights, these wonderful glimpses, these little glimpses of humor, and has a wonderful time. But she's off somewhere else.

*Struther*: But, Mr. Bryson, what leads you to say that?

*Bryson*: It's just an impression, Miss Struther.

*Struther*: First impression?

*Bryson*: No. Because I've read her more than once.

*Prescott*: With neither pride nor prejudice?

*Bryson*: No. It isn't a condemnation, Mr. Prescott. It's just not complete idolatry. I don't love this woman as completely as you do. I admire her, and she fascinates and charms me; but I don't think I love her.

*Struther*: Do you think that she in her own life was like Elizabeth Bennett? The way we're talking, it's quite difficult to follow whether we're talking about Jane Austen or Elizabeth Bennett.

*Bryson*: I think Elizabeth Bennett was very much like her, although I'm not going on that. My feeling about Jane is not really so important as the fact that to love Jane Austen and to love her characters, insofar as they seem to depict her, has become one of the marks of being a civilized person. So I mustn't jeopardize my position. What was her purpose in this? Just to have a good time?

*Prescott*: I suppose she was a woman with a need to express herself. I mean, she was an artist.

*Bryson*: Very great artist.

*Prescott*: And she wasn't insistent on having a good time, because she wrote her books anonymously and many of them weren't published till after her death. She never made any fuss about writing them. She never had a room in which to write. When callers came in, she hid the manuscript under the blotter. No, I don't think it was to have a good time. I think she had a crying need for literary expression, and she chose to practically invent the modern novel—which she did, certainly.

*Struther*: Yes, that is so. I don't really know an awful lot about her private life. I would like very much to read her letters now, since

rereading *Pride and Prejudice*, where her own character comes out in the pages of the book.

*Bryson*: But there's more in so great an artist as this, Mr. Prescott, than merely a desire to get something down on paper. What do you think her judgment on her time was? Certainly, there's a moralism in this.

*Prescott*: Absolutely! I think she accepted the standards and social conventions of her time. No one then had that socially-conscious mind that we have today. But she was a severe judge of ethical behavior, and she believed sincerely and strongly in what we call virtuous conduct. That runs through *Pride and Prejudice* from first to last.

*Struther*: When you say "virtuous conduct" you mean real virtue, not just primness.

*Prescott*: Absolutely! I don't think she would make a fuss about some little convention. She means, well, Christian teachings—generosity and kindness and honor and all those fundamental standards.

*Bryson*: What would she have thought, Mr. Prescott, if someone had completely rejected the whole system of conventional manners? What would she have thought of somebody who had a rather primitive and radical sense of morality and just said, "Oh, this is nonsense; I'll pay no attention to it."

*Prescott*: I think she would have accused him of a breach of taste, because she put great emphasis on taste.

*Bryson*: So that you must not only be moral, but you must be moral within the range of taste and convention of the society in which you are. Is that her position?

*Prescott*: I think so.

*Struther*: Well, she didn't know any other society.

*Bryson*: Oh, I'm not saying she should have had another position. I'm trying to locate this woman that people love so much. She belongs very much to a place and a time, though, doesn't she?

*Struther*: She certainly does, and I understand that she never went away from home, practically, except a short visit to Bath.

*Bryson*: Well, then, can you tell me, Miss Struther, since you are free of this infatuation, what you think is the reason for it? Here's a woman who doesn't appeal to us as a thinker, certainly not as a saint; she has this malicious wit; she's sensible, and intelligent—but those are the qualities that generally make you only like a person, not love them deeply. This is the mystery of Jane Austen, to me.

*Struther*: Well, I think that people confuse her with Elizabeth Bennett, and the people who like Elizabeth Bennett assume that Jane Austen was very much like her.

*Bryson*: Because they do fall in love with Elizabeth.

*Struther*: Yes, I think so.

*Prescott*: Well, I think they also love Jane Austen. They can feel that she loved people. She loved her better characters, and she was amused by the ones she satirized. Her niece said of her, "She seemed to love you, and you loved her in return."

*Bryson*: In other words, there is testimony, Mr. Prescott, that

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the young woman who lived all too short a life and who wrote these books was, in herself, the kind of charming and lovable person that she sometimes depicts.

*Prescott*: I believe that.

*Bryson*: And you think, then, that your justification lies in the truth of the woman behind it, not the mere literary creation of her genius?

*Prescott*: The justification for the love, yes. But the books are magnificent works of art in themselves.

*Bryson*: I think none of us would deny that they were magnificent works of art. If I have seemed a bit resistant to the charm of Jane, it's only because, whenever I find everybody in love with someone, natural perversity makes me ask why.

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# IBSEN

## Hedda Gabler

EVA Le GALLIENNE • LOUIS KRONENBERGER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I suppose Ibsen knew more about women than any man has a right to know. Not being a woman, I can't decide that. Certainly, he was concerned about them not only because of their status in the society of his time—which we think of as being rather stuffy and stiff—but also about them as human beings. Perhaps that is the key to Ibsen—that he thought of women as human beings. They hadn't really been thought of much that way.

*LeGallienne*: Except that in Scandinavia they were thought of as human beings more than they were in the Anglo-Saxon world.

*Bryson*: It's just your Danish ancestry that makes you say that.

*LeG*: No, No. You look at the old sagas. It's true.

*Kronenberger*: Well, maybe they made themselves be more thought of as human beings.

*LeG*: That's possible.

*Bryson*: There were heroines in Scandinavia almost as soon as there were heroes. Well, Ibsen has a curious heroine here, Miss LeGallienne. She wasn't a nice person.

*LeG*: No. She was a very unhappy, bitter, frustrated person and a terrible egocentric. I think this is probably the first really complete psychological study of a woman that was ever written for the stage in a modern sense. Don't you think so?

*Bryson*: As against the Greeks and the great French dramatists and as against Shakespeare, yes. Ibsen went deeper, is that it?

*LeG*: Yes. Also, I think, he handled all the little nuances, whereas the Greeks took things in a broad sweep. Ibsen delved deep into the little corners and all the shadows. It's frightening to see how much he knew about women. It's certainly extraordinary.

*Kronenberger*: Hedda has a kind of neurotic sensibility, don't you think, that was new to the stage? Just as *Hamlet* was new and became, ever after, a kind of model and prototype.

*LeG*: That's true. And it seems to me that in the Ibsen gallery,

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Hedda Gabler is perhaps what Hamlet is to the Shakespeare gallery. When you say "Ibsen," people nearly always think of *Hedda Gabler*.

*Bryson*: It took mankind two hundred years after Shakespeare to find out that women could be neurotic as well as men?

*LeG*: Well, you have to remember that, in Shakespeare's time, women were all played by boys. I don't think a boy could play Hedda Gabler. That's just the difference between the old classical line of treating a woman and the modern.

*Bryson*: So you had to have the modern theatre before you could have the modern woman in the theatre. But why do you say she was frustrated? She was a woman of family; she wasn't in real trouble until she put herself into trouble. What was the frustration?

*LeG*: Well, she was in the wrong place. She was in the wrong milieu. I think she was really a born aristocrat. She found herself in the stuffy lower middle-class atmosphere and she felt trapped by it. Of course, she wasn't a nice woman. Your preface was correct in that. She was a selfish woman.

*Bryson*: And why did she marry this small and insignificant Professor Tessman? After all, she was a general's daughter.

*LeG*: I think her reputation had been quite badly damaged. To begin with, her father died, and she had been involved quite extensively with Lövborg. . . .

*Bryson*: The poet.

*LeG*: . . . who was known as a wild character. I think she had got herself much talked about with him. She also says to Brack, you know, that she was tired of dancing and that she was getting on. She doesn't say she's getting old; she would never put it into words; but she is thirty. And that, at that time, was time to get married.

*Kronenberger*: I think so. But isn't there a sense in which the Hedda Gabler type is seen as a misfit by the people that she grows up with? They don't quite trust her; they know she's a little different. She doesn't bother to be nice to them. An *arriviste* like Becky Sharp, who has some of the same qualities, is very careful when she gets into higher society. But Hedda probably snubbed these people and showed them that she wasn't interested in what they were.

*Bryson*: She thought of herself as a real aristocrat.

*LeG*: Yes, she probably had some of the bad manners that some aristocrats boast.

*Kronenberger*: She's the kind of woman who isn't very happy in a highly conventional society, but is even less happy away from it.

*Bryson*: Mr. Kronenberger, of course that's true, but she was conventional, too. Isn't it implied in what Miss LeGallienne said—that she wouldn't have gone with Lövborg, she wouldn't have married Lövborg?

*LeG*: No, no, no. She was extremely conventional.

*Kronenberger*: Well, that's why I say that she's less happy in another milieu than she was in her own, because she can't really get very far away from the conventional.

*Bryson*: She couldn't have gone with the poet and have been, herself, wild and unconventional.

*Kronenberger*: No, she could never be a Bohemian.

*LeG*: Never. As a matter of fact, I think that's one of the reasons why she resents Thea, Mrs. Elsted, so much, because Mrs. Elsted loves Lövborg and is willing to go with that love. She's strong enough to do that, whereas Hedda never had been. Hedda has always been a coward about being talked about, about anything that was not conventionality.

*Bryson*: It is her conventionality that makes her a coward, and also frustrates her and makes her a tragic figure. Is that right?

*LeG*: Yes. I think it's also through conventionality that she finally shoots herself.

*Bryson*: She takes the conventional way out?

*LeG*: Well, she won't be faced with a situation that is in any way unpleasant or messy. I think the words *noblesse oblige* are constantly in her mind. At that period *noblesse oblige* was a great thing, and I'm sure that her father used to say to her "*noblesse oblige*."

*Kronenberger*: Yes. I think she probably has just that courage—no courage of her convictions but somewhat the courage of her class.

*LeG*: That's right. That's just what I mean.

*Bryson*: But now see how this works out. It was a bitter mistake on her part, no doubt, considering what she wanted of life, to marry the little pedant, the little professor, Tessman. She never was going to be happy with him. That's obviously true.

*LeG*: I don't think she had any choice, really, do you?

*Bryson*: Well, perhaps not. But she didn't try very hard to be happy with him. She snubbed his relatives and she treated him abominably and she made it perfectly clear that she was bored. I'm remembering you in the part, Miss LeGallienne, and I'm sure that's the way Hedda was. You were not very pleasant to Tessman in that play. And then, when her poet-lover, or her poet-friend, whom she thinks of as the romance of her life, comes back, Lövborg, she doesn't treat him very well either; in fact, she treats him abominably. Is she just striking out at life?

*LeG*: In a way. I doubt if she thinks she treats Lövborg abominably. I think she wants to free him from a sort of . . . well, bondage. Thea, you see, wants to make him a good, ordinary, self-respecting citizen. But Hedda feels that he should have the freedom to be a genius.

*Bryson*: Even though she would never have gone with him into that freedom.

*LeG*: No, she wouldn't go.

*Bryson*: She thinks he should go. And she's disappointed in him because he won't go.

*LeG*: Yes, I think so.

*Bryson*: What he does do is to go and get drunk.

*LeG*: Yes, he does. At the very end he disappoints her bitterly, because he doesn't do what he promised her to do, and that is shoot himself. He gets shot in a very dirty, horrid accident, which, of course, offends her sense of esthetics, of which she's very much aware.

*Bryson*: But, Miss LeGallienne, we can remember that per-

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fectly terrifying scene in which she takes the manuscript, which is the one beautiful thing, she thinks, in her poet's life, and the thing that she helped, she thought, to create. She thinks this is out of him . . .

*LeG*: That's right. But not "out of me."

*Bryson*: Is that why she burns it?

*LeG*: Well, that's one of the reasons why she burns it.

*Bryson*: But she does destroy the best part of this man that represented to her at least a vision or glimpse for a moment of glory and freedom.

*LeG*: Yes. I don't think Hedda ever thinks of the manuscript in intellectual terms. The fatal word that is used is the word "the child," between Thea and Lövborg. Don't you think so, Mr. Kronenberger?

*Kronenberger*: It was the other woman's child, Miss LeGallienne; also, she had nothing to do with it.

*LeG*: That's it. And she, herself, is bearing the child of Tessman.

*Bryson*: A real child.

*LeG*: The real child, which she looks upon with disgust.

*Kronenberger*: The contrast becomes more and more hateful. But, actually, hasn't she got a kind of creativeness that consists in marrying, rather than making?

*LeG*: Yes, I think she has.

*Kronenberger*: The kind of destructive creativeness that Iago had.

*LeG*: That's right. It's a power, it's a force, and it's destructive.

*Kronenberger*: They cannot let well enough alone; they can't let anything good alone. They have to tamper and manipulate and make over.

*LeG*: I think that's a very good point.

*Bryson*: It seems to me, Mr. Kronenberger, that makes her more evil than she has ever seemed. What you say is that she was of such a nature that, given any destiny, she still would have been a destructive and evil person.

*Kronenberger*: Well, hers is a smaller kind of destructiveness. It's much closer there to Becky Sharp than it is to Iago. I mean, there's no profound moral quality involved, either black or white. But I do think there are people who just must meddle and mar because they cannot create.

*Bryson*: What I'm getting at is this, Mr. Kronenberger: we ordinarily think of Ibsen, perhaps less so in this play than in most, as being always concerned with showing the individual—and so often it was a woman—caught in a social situation in such a way that you have the feeling that if society had been better, if society had been different, that individual might have led a beautiful, rather than a horrible or a tragic or a destructive life. Now, you're saying that Hedda was not so much such a person caught by the social situation in which she found herself, basically, but that it was her nature that made her evil.

*LeG*: If that's what you mean, Mr. Kronenberger, I don't quite agree with it.

*Kronenberger*: No, I don't agree with that.

*Bryson*: That isn't what you mean.

*Kronenberger*: I think she's the product of a certain world. And, I think, as the product of that world, she's never found herself; she can't be a *grande dame* on her lines; she can't be a creative woman on her lines, and it seems to me that she, therefore, must spoil other people's fun a little. She must have her hand in things. She wants power more than anything else.

*LeG*: She craves power.

*Bryson*: Then this is not a play, as *Doll's House* is, for instance, in which Ibsen is credited with making a comment upon what we do to women, rather than what women are.

*Kronenberger*: I think this is the complete antithesis to *The Doll's House*.

*LeG*: So do I.

*Kronenberger*: In *The Doll's House* Ibsen is saying: "Women must have freedom to develop." In this, he is saying: "Women must not have freedom to destroy." In other words, this is a woman who is misusing freedom, is using it without any sense of moral responsibility. I think he's protesting there, just as he seems to protest in *The Wild Duck* against a useless, irresponsible holding up of knowledge to other people that does nobody any good.

*LeG*: I've always felt that in *Hedda* he really hadn't much of a social point of view in mind. I think he was portraying a woman from a psychological point of view. And I've often felt that if Hedda, for instance, had been married to a diplomat or to somebody who had a brilliant circle of people around him, so that she was at the head of a very brilliant salon, and met and was constantly in touch with interesting and scintillating people and could be a great, famous hostess, she might have been quite happy, and her life would not have been so tragic.

*Kronenberger*: Oh, I agree with you. That's what I mean. If she had been a *grande dame*, if she'd been the center of a really distinguished society . . .

*Bryson*: She could have been happy.

*LeG*: Yes, I think she could.

*Bryson*: I see. Well, then she isn't evil. After all, Iago couldn't have been happy.

*LeG*: I've never felt she was evil.

*Kronenberger*: No, I didn't mean to press that point. But she's destructive.

*Bryson*: You've given one answer to the reason why Hedda is both very modern to her time and also timeless, and that is—that she isn't just a type; she is a person in herself. She's very much a person.

*LeG*: Oh, very much! Very much of an individual.

*Bryson*: Not just the product of an age or of a social situation.

*LeG*: No, I think she's a great individual.

*Bryson*: What about the other characters? What about Tess-

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man, this little pedant, this little professor that she marries, who is so completely inadequate to give her any feeling?

*LeG*: Well, he's inadequate for her, but at the same time Tessman is very often played far too much as a clown.

*Bryson*: He's a nice little man.

*LeG*: He is. And not only is he a nice little man, but he has been given honorary doctorates at some universities in Germany and abroad. Well, you know, people don't get those things. His work is highly admired.

*Bryson*: But he's narrow and specialized.

*LeG*: Yes, he's a pedant. Collecting and arranging are his great achievements.

*Bryson*: I have a feeling that it's necessary to defend the professors sometimes.

*LeG*: I think he should be defended. He's not a fool, and he oughtn't to be played like a fool. It's just that he gets on Hedda's nerves to a horrifying degree.

*Kronenberger*: He gets on her nerves, and her power over him is too easy. And there's the famous phrase, "Fancy that, Hedda," that he's always using.

*LeG*: But that's just a cliché. As a matter of fact, the actual thing he says in Norwegian is, "Think of that!" "Fancy that" does fancy it up a bit.

*Kronenberger*: But it does mean that he's always impressed by the most unimportant things.

*LeG*: He's like a child. And he lives at the moment, completely; he has a sort of wonder, and he's terribly gullible. But he's nice. He's a nice man.

*Bryson*: What about this other man, who also disappoints her, Lövborg, her poet? What's the matter with him? He's talented, he's wild.

*LeG*: I always think of Lövborg as two men.

*Bryson*: Two men?

*LeG*: Yes. One is a very sensitive, intelligent, poetic, good, gentle man. The other is the demon, and the demon comes alive when he drinks. The moment he begins to drink he's like Jekyll and Hyde.

*Bryson*: Which one did Hedda love?

*LeG*: Hedda, I think, loved the demon and Mrs. Elstedt loved the real Lövborg.

*Bryson*: That's why she hated Mrs. Elstedt.

*LeG*: Yes, I think so. People have often said: How could two such different women love the same man? And it seems to me that they don't love the same man. They each love a side of him. One loves one side of him: one loves the other.

*Bryson*: But suppose circumstances had been a little different and she had got Lövborg into her power, the way she got the quite inadequate Tessman—would she have made a great poet out of his demoniac nature?

*LeG*: I don't think so.

*Bryson*: In other words, she would have been disappointed then, too.

*LeG*: Yes. I wonder whether Lövborg really was a genius. What do you think?

*Kronenberger*: It's all relative. He was a genius compared to Tessman.

*LeG*: Well, he was more exciting, certainly.

*Kronenberger*: But don't you think that possibly the good half of Lövborg didn't react to Hedda.

*LeG*: That's right. You're right.

*Kronenberger*: That is one reason why she had no use for Thea.

*LeG*: That is right. You're quite right. The good side of Lövborg wouldn't have been attracted.

*Bryson*: She calls out the demon in him.

*LeG*: That's it.

*Bryson*: And there's no demon in Tessman.

*LeG*: No. None whatsoever. He wouldn't even know what it meant.

*Bryson*: What about Brack, this cold, well-placed man-of-the-world who moves in on Hedda when he sees that she's in trouble and gives her due warning that, having her in trouble, he's going to exact some toll? What about him? Is he just the force of circumstance? Just the conventionality moving in?

*LeG*: No, it seems to me that he's a man who's been always a *bon viveur* and who's probably burnt himself out, and now he lives vicariously. I think he's probably always been very much attracted to Hedda, even before she was married, but was too cautious to have anything to do with her until she was safely Mrs. Tessman.

*Bryson*: And now that she's in trouble, he's going to take her over, isn't he? He practically says, "Now you belong to me."

*LeG*: Yes. All of their scenes together are like fencing matches. They belong to the same world. That's why they're allied.

*Kronenberger*: That's one reason. He represents the world she came out of and the world that, I still think, she's most comfortable in, although she's not happy in it, or doesn't think she's happy.

*Bryson*: And yet, when she sees that Brack can make her do whatever he takes it into his head to do—he can take her over as his mistress if he wants to . . .

*LeG*: That she would never put up with.

*Bryson*: That's when she goes and shoots herself.

*LeG*: That's when I think the *noblesse oblige* idea becomes so strong and gives her a kind of gallantry and courage which one can't help but admire. After all, it isn't so easy to shoot yourself—at least, I shouldn't think so.

*Bryson*: You think, then, that it's because her conventionality comes to the top then that she has that courage. I don't mean conventionality in the mean sense; I mean her sense of fitness, her sense of decorum.

*LeG*: Her fastidiousness.

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*Bryson*: This is messy, and evil. No fastidious woman can accept this situation; death is better.

*LeG*: Yes, that's right.

*Kronenberger*: I'm not sure that I think that the suicide is altogether inevitable. She hasn't played her last cards yet. I don't quarrel with it, because I think it's implicit in her character, but my only real objection to the play is that the cards do begin to get stacked in the last act.

*Bryson*: But you remember Brack's remark, "People don't do that."

*Kronenberger*: Well, that's a very fine remark: "People don't do such things." And that's a fine remark also in terms of Ibsen, answering critics who would think the suicide was too melodramatic. I just think it's led up to too melodramatically.

*LeG*: I don't think it should be. Maybe it isn't played right.

*Kronenberger*: Well, Lövborg lugging around his manuscript and then losing it, then the aunt getting sick at just that moment, and then Mrs. Elsted having her pocket full of writings with which she goes over to another room where she and Brack can talk . . .

*LeG*: I think there are so many reasons for all those things. Of course, the whole play takes place in one day, really, and it's part of the economy of line of Ibsen's writing, I suppose, that disturbs you.

*Bryson*: "Economy of line!" Now tell me, Miss LeGallienne—you have written about Ibsen; you've translated Ibsen; you've played Ibsen; you probably know as much about him as anybody we're likely to ask such a question of—how does he create such tremendous effect in such brevity? He's almost like a marksman with a rifle. He wants to give you a feeling of a character and he hits the bull's eye. How?

*LeG*: It's true. Well, it's very difficult to analyze. I do know that his plays are all very short, and yet when you come to the end of one of them you feel as if you knew the life history of every one of the characters.

*Bryson*: But how does it feel to play a woman like Hedda Gabler?

*LeG*: It seems to me, as an actress, that what makes Ibsen so interesting to play are the things that happen when you are not actually talking, the sort of inner life of the characters.

*Bryson*: Does he suggest that to you?

*LeG*: He suggests it in a thousand ways. That's why you have to know every bit of the play so intimately. And the inner life that you have to sustain constantly on the stage, whether you're speaking or not, is really the most important part of your performance.

*Bryson*: This is a technical question, but it bears on this point: did Ibsen write business into his text? Did he tell you what to do when you weren't speaking?

*LeG*: Not nearly as much as most playwrights.

*Bryson*: Not as much as the modern playwrights do.

*LeG*: For instance, at the very end, before Hedda burns the manuscript, all he says is: "She goes to the desk, takes out the manuscript, goes to the stove and throws it in." That's all he says.



*Kronenberger*: One reason why his characters, or so many of his characters, are real is that, while he gives you an intense sense of what they're like, he doesn't bother you with the kind of detail that makes you stop and wonder: is this right or wrong? They keep constantly moving, in terms of the general structure, don't they?

*LeG*: Yes, that's quite true.

*Bryson*: Well, you mention both character and sense of dramatic structure. His characters are sound and they're rounded, but he also knows how to put a play together.

*LeG*: Oh yes, my goodness!

*Bryson*: Well, of all the plays of Ibsen, why is it that *Hedda Gabler* is the one that one thinks of most? What is there that makes this character stand up as Ibsen the way, well, as you said, *Hamlet* stands up as Shakespeare?

*LeG*: What would you say to that, Mr. Kronenberger?

*Kronenberger*: Well, I don't know whether you would back me up, and you would be the one who would know, I would say that this is probably the most interesting woman character that has been written in the last sixty years, in terms of fullness and in terms of the ability to interpret.

*Bryson*: And in terms of complicatedness. I mean, you don't get to the bottom of this character.

*LeG*: That's true. You never get to the bottom. I've been playing it for years, and every time I play it, I feel, why didn't I think of that—why didn't I see that before? You never reach the bottom of it.

*Bryson*: And what about playing it? Is it still alive in the theatre?

*LeG*: Oh, it's enormously alive.

*Bryson*: And do people still feel it in the theatre?

*LeG*: Tremendously. It has an enormous impact on an audience.

*Bryson*: More than other Ibsen?

*LeG*: Well, I wouldn't say more than other Ibsen, but certainly it comes among the very top. *Ghosts* also holds up very well. Of course, all the great plays of Ibsen are timeless.

*Bryson*: But it may be that there's something in *Hedda*, in this complication of her character, and in the tragedy of her fate, that gives her a kind of third tragic dimension.

*LeG*: Well, maybe it's that people are always much more interested in *femmes fatales* than they are in nice, good little women.

*Bryson*: Well, you know, a French novelist once said, Miss LeGallienne, that anybody can write a good novel about a bad woman, but very few can write a good novel or a play about a good woman.

*Kronenberger*: Well, she's a real character. And I think it's because there's so little social complication, so little problem-play aspect about her, that one goes on caring.

*LeG*: I think that's true.

*Bryson*: And in the case of all great plays, you have really to see it, to get it.

de SEVIGNE

The Letters of  
Mme. de Sevigne

DANIEL GIRARD

•

LISA SERGIO

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I suppose a person has to have a kind of special taste to read letters and journals, but I confess that, to me, they give a peculiar pleasure. I'm seduced by them. I'm fooled by them. I have a feeling, when I read letters or journals, that I'm getting a kind of truth that I don't get even in the very greatest imaginative literature. It isn't true, of course. I'm quite sure that there is as much imagination, and possibly as much fiction, in the things that Mme. de Sevigne wrote as there is in a French novel. But I always feel that I'm getting closer to a person. And when it's a person like this, that's something worth doing. Well, these letters of Mme. de Sevigne form a book—or, rather, a lot of books.

*Sergio*: Yes, they do add up to a lot of books. To me, this particular lady, whom I read quite extensively when I was in school—back home in Florence we used to read her—today gives me great pleasure because she is really the precursor of the kind of person I try to be. She was a news analyst.

*Bryson*: A news analyst, Miss Sergio? There was no broadcasting; there were no newspapers.

*Sergio*: There was no broadcasting; there were no columnists. But she has the quality—I hoped you would agree, Mr. Bryson—of the analyst of events, the honest reporter, and the columnist, the gossip columnist without meanness about her, but the gossip columnist. So she is really, all rolled into one, the kind of person that we people who try to understand and then explain the news are trying to be.

*Bryson*: She has a somewhat wider range than a news analyst today would have, because she can do anything she pleases in these letters to her daughter and her friends. But I see what you mean. I have no idea whether she was an accurate reporter or not.

*Girard*: Well, Mr. Bryson, she did describe some of the great events of her time.

*Bryson*: Accurately, Mr. Girard?

*Girard*: Well, she told them as a witness sometimes. For instance, she attended the trials of Fouquet, who was in disgrace at the time, and she reported to her friend that he was in the country and would return to trial. From the reading of it, it seems like a very accurate and human way of reporting.

*Bryson*: It's certainly human, and it's fascinating. I don't suppose the accuracy of it really makes much difference, because you don't read these letters primarily to get history, do you?

*Girard*: No, you don't. She puts the human touch to it, all right. You get the little details of the life of the day. Of course, you also get some of the stories of what was going on at Versailles and at the court, the way the women would dress, and so on.

*Bryson*: Oh yes, there's that wonderful letter, in which she tells the great news that the height of the hair-do has come down. And she immediately has to write to somebody in the province to say, "You've got to reduce the height of your hair-do because everybody in the court is wearing her hair much closer to her head." Great sensation!

*Sergio*: Yes, but she didn't confine herself to that kind of thing.

*Bryson*: Did she confine herself to anything? Was there any subject this woman didn't write about?

*Sergio*: Well, if you can call people and their reactions to the vicissitudes of life a subject, or a confinement to a subject, I would say that that was her chief concern.

*Bryson*: People in her own class, Miss Sergio.

*Sergio*: Oh, always. Perhaps that's a point that one should make clear. The distinction between social classes in those days was so extraordinary.

*Bryson*: We might remember that those days were the middle of the seventeenth century, just a hundred years before the Revolution—but rumblings of the Revolution were always there, weren't they?

*Sergio*: Oh yes. It was the period under Louis XIV, the Sun King, when, like all things that reach a peak before they inevitably come down, there was great splendor about that era, and the splendor was confined to Mme. de Sevigne's class. She understood the people, even when she described hair-do. I vaguely remember one letter—I don't believe it's ever even been translated, but it comes to my mind—where she says, "What the change of a hair-do would do for you, my dear!" Mr. Girard, has your wife never said to you, "I must go to the hairdresser. I'm so worried about everything. It would do me so much good to change my hair-do"?

*Girard*: Yes, Miss Sergio, that is true. Mme. de Sevigne had an eye for detail. But, as you've indicated, she was not socially conscious of what was going on.

*Bryson*: No. When you say "the people," you don't mean the common peasants who did the work. You mean the aristocrats.

*Sergio*: I mean the human beings.

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*Bryson*: The elite of her own class. After all, they were human, too.

*Girard*: Yes. You remember the letter in which she commends the Governor of Brittany for having suppressed a severe rebellion against the King among the peasantry. She does not sympathize with the peasants. On the contrary, they had disobeyed the King. The King was God—and that was the law.

*Bryson*: Yet that was the time, Mr. Girard, when a member of her own class, La Bruyere, wrote that perfectly horrifying description of the life of those peasants—these beasts that had run away from the sun to their caves at night, did nothing but toil and got almost nothing out of even what they had earned for themselves. She doesn't see that; she is never touched by it. She's not cruel so much as indifferent.

*Sergio*: It isn't to defend the lady that I'm saying this, but because it is a fact of which one isn't very much aware if one hasn't come from countries that even in modern times have had social distinctions. She could not know. It was a lack of knowledge of the fact that the peasants toiled that way and ran away. Also, they had a curious idea, all through that period and until the Revolution, as you say, of our basic concept that God creates men equal. They were very good Christians, and out of Christian charity they would do great things. But the idea that the man who was born to be a peasant had as much of a right as she did to take a bath—which he never could do—or have clean clothes, never entered her head. She was not mean or cruel. But down the ages, in her background, there was an understanding that for some reason, known only to God, "I," would say Mme. de Sevigne, "was born where you have perfume and water and good food and servants, and the other character was born to live in a cave; and you don't question God's decision." If you realize that dreadful approach to life, you understand, then, the value of her letters, and you are not impressed by this total lack of social understanding, of which Mr. Girard speaks.

*Bryson*: In our modern condescending way, Miss Sergio, if we forgive her for not being anything but a product of her own class, what is it that is so seductive, so fascinating, about this woman?

*Sergio*: She had such originality of mind. Her comments about everything she sees are keen and sharp.

*Bryson*: She has wit, hasn't she?

*Sergio*: Wit, and a tremendous sense of humor.

*Bryson*: And she is sometimes malicious—in the French sense, rather than the English—gently, teasingly malicious. She always makes a little fun of the aristocrats in the provinces. They're overdoing things a little bit. She comes from Paris, and, although she loves to live in the provinces, and, although her daughter, to whom she writes so many of these letters, is the wife of the deputy governor of a province, she's a very great lady. She wasn't a particularly wealthy woman, but her house in Paris—it's now a museum—was quite a substantial house. The King came and talked to her at the performance of Racine's play. She was a great lady.

*Girard*: Do you remember one of the letters, Mr. Bryson, written after she has watched the fire that nearly destroyed the house of her wealthy neighbor across the street? She says at the end of the letter that, if the tragedy of the fire had not been so great, it would have been laughable to see these aristocrats come out in their night-shirts and wearing so little.

*Bryson*: Yes. She gives a wonderful description of those people going around half-dressed—people who ordinarily would be in their wigs and their tight clothes and their silks and satins. They are very funny as she describes them. The touch of malice is always there. But it's more than malice; it's more than observation. She also has great dramatic power, hasn't she? The little story of the cook that killed himself because he *thought* he was going to fail to produce the kind of food the King deserved?

*Sergio*: Yes. He had sent men out to get the fish, but the men who went to buy the fish came back only after he'd killed himself.

*Bryson*: He was the great cook, who couldn't stand even in the shadow of disgrace.

*Sergio*: Even in that description, you sense what you mentioned before. There's a little touch of irony. The cook killed himself, a human being killed himself because of fish that didn't come.

*Bryson*: There's a very curious thing there, Miss Sergio, which is part of this seductive quality in Mme. de Sevigne. At the same time that she's making fun of the cook for killing himself over a dinner, she realizes that he's a cook, and that he's the greatest cook in France. To him the failure of a dinner is professional dishonor. She realizes that, but she thinks it's funny, too.

*Sergio*: That's why she has a sense of values about people. Don't you think that appears all through her letters—a sense of what is valuable and what isn't?

*Girard*: She also shows that same attitude in her description of Turenne's death, when he's cut in two by a bullet. She gives you the direct tragedy but also a little point of irony, saying a great man has gone—however, the victory might have been greater.

*Sergio*: Speaking of victory, may I quote a little piece from one letter, Mr. Bryson, that refers also to her lack of social sense? She's not cruel, but this is so typical of her time. There has been a victory, and she says: "We believe that we have actually bought this victory at a great price. Not at all! It has only cost us a few soldiers and not one single man with a name. This is what is really complete happiness."

*Bryson*: If you can just win your victories by killing off the common soldiers and not losing any of the nobility, that's complete happiness. Is there malice in that? Does she know that she's being ironic?

*Sergio*: No, she doesn't.

*Bryson*: You think that's just straight face; that's just herself.

*Sergio*: Sure! She's been raised in a milieu in which you don't know people who don't have a name.

*Bryson*: We've said nothing at all about the other aspect of her character, which, I suppose, no person can be a really great writer

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without—and she was a great writer—and that is passion. She had an insane passion for her daughter. She lost her husband when she was quite young; she devoted her life to her children—and, by the way, isn't it important to mention that she devoted her life to her children and, in the midst of a very corrupt court, there never was a breath of scandal about her.

*Sergio:* Never! One man who tried to create that breath of scandal was so totally squelched by her women contemporaries, mind you, who respected her so much, that he was practically disgraced. It was her cousin. Many men, of course, wooed her and would have married her; she could have married almost anybody. But she had this feeling, probably because her husband was such a no-good-at-all, that she had the responsibility of raising her son and daughter and devoting her life to them.

*Bryson:* Well, her son was a no-good, too.

*Sergio:* Unfortunately, yes. But she couldn't have known that he would be at the beginning when she was just a young widow in her twenties, and she made that the one devotion of her life. She adored her daughter.

*Bryson:* And yet, there's that curious and almost touching passage where this priest, the *abbé* that she was so fond of and who was her guide and mentor, scolds her so and tells her that she idolizes, and that idolatry even of a daughter is a great sin. What would you say of such a love today? Is it healthy?

*Girard:* It might not look too healthy to modern psychiatrists, but we understand how, perhaps, mothers love can be exaggerated and yet look normal—or be normal and look exaggerated.

*Bryson:* I might say, Mr. Girard, I'm glad there were no psychiatrists there at that time to cure her, because we'd have lost one of the world's great books.

*Sergio:* They would have sent her to one, surely.

*Bryson:* They would, undoubtedly. But how much of this is the exaggeration of the style of the period? Although she's capable of sharpness and meanness, she's also capable of a kind of relaxed lyrical sentimentality, of over-sensibility.

*Sergio:* Well, Mr. Bryson, you know she didn't have a companion in her life.

*Bryson:* No. She had no friends either.

*Sergio:* No real companion. Whether M. de Sevigne would or would not have made a good companion if he had not died in a duel is another question. But there was no one with whom she could talk daily in her home. When you get up in the morning and are going about the business of getting dressed, you'll remark to the person you live with about the little things, or you give vent to an anger that you have within you, or to a great excitement. She had no one.

*Bryson:* And how fortunate for us!

*Sergio:* She put all that into letters. She has one passage in which she describes to a friend—not to her daughter—how she wrote these letters. She said, "I let my mood of the moment set the mood of the entire letter, and I keep it up until the end. I am not a letter-writer.

I tell what I know, what I see, what I think." But, of course, that was the period in which letter-writing was as much a part of your education as knowing how to multiply or add would be today. You know that it was a very lucrative profession to be what was known as a private secretary? People hired you to write their letters. And then you got blackmailed, I suppose, to a fare-thee-well. But they wrote all your letters, including your love letters.

*Bryson*: You could even buy books on how to write great letters.

*Sergio*: We think in America that we specialize in the type of book that is a how-to-do-this and how-to-do-that; in France the how-to book at this period was particularly popular and how-to-write-letters was one of the fastest-selling items on the market.

*Girard*: Popular only for the upper crust.

*Bryson*: The lower classes could neither read nor write.

*Girard*: That's right.

*Bryson*: But she didn't think of herself as a letter-writer. In other words, she wasn't writing to be literary.

*Sergio*: But she must have known that she was writing to have her letters published. Everybody's letters were published in those days.

*Girard*: May I disagree? I don't think so, Miss Sergio. Her letters were not published until 1715 or 1716, and then by her granddaughter. I'm sure that she knew that she was not writing for publication. She did know that she might be writing for members of the family. Letters were passed around in those days and read by a fairly wide circle. But she writes, as you indicated, as the ink flows from the pen, naturally, and not with a view to posterity.

*Sergio*: You don't think so?

*Girard*: I don't think so. That's the strength or the greatness of her letters.

*Bryson*: But a lot of people knew about her letters, even though they weren't published. Didn't she have some fame in her own day, Mr. Girard?

*Girard*: Late in her life, yes, in the 1690s—toward the turn of the century.

*Sergio*: Her letters were passed around.

*Bryson*: After all, she knew most of the great literary men of her time.

*Girard*: Yes, she did.

*Bryson*: She moved in those circles. Voltaire seems to dismiss her literary taste rather cavalierly, but, actually, she wrote about the writers of her time with a good deal of perception and insight.

*Girard*: Yes, she did.

*Bryson*: She felt the great art of that seventeenth century France, the great music, the great architecture, the great wit. It flowed through her. She was a kind of example of it.

*Sergio*: People like Moliere would come to her and read plays, and she would discuss with them and advise them. There are letters in which she describes how M. Moliere came and read this and that.

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*Bryson*: Did she tell him when he was funny and when he wasn't?

*Sergio*: Oh yes, she would be his best audience. It was almost as today. When you're trying to raise money to put a play on Broadway, you get a group of people, and you read them the script and see what the reaction is. In those days, they didn't need to get the money to put the play on, but you had to get a public reaction. So she would rather around her some of the leading people, people who had taste socially, and people who had taste artistically. And she advised Moliere on some changes. She says that.

*Girard*: Would you say, Miss Sergio, that the letters of Mme. de Sevigne's day took the place of good, high-class conversation?

*Bryson*: They took the place of the telephone. Nowadays one doesn't know how many Mme. de Sevigne's there may be running around, who are spilling all kinds of this delightful gossip and drama and wit and sophistication into a telephone and nobody gets it but the one who happens to be at the other end.

*Sergio*: We've lost the art of letter-writing in modern times, as much as we've lost the art of conversation. To sit around after dinner, in the evening, without clearing the table—which is the standard European method—and keep on drinking coffee or wine or whatever is on the table till two or three in the morning, discussing the whole world of ideas is a treat that we miss now. I have friends in France or Italy who do that all the time. But we tend to be losing the habit everywhere.

*Bryson*: You mean these dreadful modern conveniences have ruined that part of life, Miss Sergio?

*Sergio*: I'm afraid I have to say so. One of those helps me to make a living, so I don't want to destroy it.

*Bryson*: Well, how sorry can one feel about losing a kind of civilization which we can see at its peak in this woman? To me, her book has a unique quality in the fact that here is one of the great writers of France—that's true, isn't it, Mr. Girard?

*Girard*: Yes, it is true.

*Bryson*: Here is one of the great writers, and yet, in one sense, she never was a writer at all. She wrote what came into her mind, mostly to this daughter whom she adored. So, in a sense, here is the consumer of great civilization depicted. This is a picture of the person who is a member of the very greatest kind of aristocratic society, but who is not herself a creator at all. She just is the great appreciator.

*Sergio*: She's a painter. She's an impressionist painter of everything that went on around her.

*Bryson*: That's right. But that only shows the greatness of it. She was a great creation of a society, in her sensibility, her wit, her literary skill, her decorum, her proper Christianity, her passionate devotion to her children, and her virtue.

*Girard*: Yet she kept everything clear and not exaggerated. She didn't, in her letters, give an impression of artificiality or of *precieux*, as you find in some other women writers of the period.



*Bryson*: To a person to whom French is a native language, as it is to you, Mr. Girard, how does it seem to read these?

*Girard*: They seem exceedingly fresh when you read them today. They're very simple. It's like flowing water down a brook.

*Bryson*: Can it be translated?

*Girard*: Oh yes. They carry into English the simplicity and the directness of the fine observation. Yes, indeed.

*Bryson*: And this range of ideas! I love the passage where she writes to one of her friends and says, "I'm sure the grandchildren of the little nightingale on your estate will be singing prettier because you've come back."

*Sergio*: She has a passage in which she tells a very close friend of the engagement of her daughter. Her daughter, you know, was twenty-four before she got married. She was practically an old maid. And this is the way she describes it: "I must tell you a piece of news that will, I'm sure, give you pleasure. It is that the prettiest girl in France is going to be married—not to the handsomest youth, but to one of the worthiest men in the kingdom. All this man's wives died to give place to your cousin, and, through extraordinary kindness, even his father and mother died, too. So that, knowing him to be richer than ever and finding him, besides, by birth, situation, and good qualities everything we could wish, we have not trafficked with him as is customary on the occasion, but confided in the two families that have gone before us. The public seems pleased, and this is a great deal, for we are such fools as to be almost always governed by public opinion."

*Bryson*: That's typical, isn't it, because it shows her devotion to worldliness on the one hand, and, on the other hand, her ability to laugh at herself and those around her, because they're always devoted to the world. And this man whom her daughter married, after all, wasn't very much, except a great noble, was he?

*Sergio*: No, and I don't think he made her daughter happy. Perhaps in that fact you might find a reason for her daughter's bitterness and lack of warm response to her mother's great devotion, and her mother's passionate desire to fill this woman's life with the things of the life that she had left behind to follow the husband. Perhaps in this man's lack of all the qualities they looked for, you might find the reason for the great thing that Mme. de Sevigne has left us—this passionate desire to make her daughter come into the life that she might otherwise have led and didn't.

*Bryson*: I suppose that's another example, Miss Sergio, of the fact that these people's misfortunes were our very good luck.

# BRONTE

## *Jane Eyre*

JOHN W. ALDRICH • MARGARET WEBSTER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I admit that, in undertaking to reread *Jane Eyre*, I was a bit disturbed by the prospect of mid-Victorian rhetoric and the self-consciousness about men and women characteristic of the times. It didn't take very long before I was caught by this book, as I have not been by other books of that particular time, and I remembered that it was shocking to the people who first read it about a hundred years ago—shocking not only because a woman had written it, but because she had written the way she did about a woman. It's another one of these ground-breaking books about women.

*Webster*: I've always been puzzled as to why *Jane* shocked her contemporaries so deeply. It was partly, I think, because of her outspokenness—no woman was expected to be as direct as Jane was—and partly because of the quality of the feeling between her and Mr. Rochester, which may have appeared almost naked in its intensity to contemporaries of the book.

*Bryson*: Well, in 1847, Miss Webster, women had passions they weren't supposed to let anybody know about.

*Webster*: They concealed them almost as carefully as their lower limbs.

*Aldrich*: Yes! The problem is that Jane is a woman who refuses to accept the conventions of passivity.

*Bryson*: And yet, Mr. Aldrich, in principle she's just as rigid and determined as any virtuous little woman ever was. She is not going to marry Mr. Rochester and be his bigamist wife in spite of the fact that she adores him.

*Aldrich*: Yes! She stays within the limits of the social strata generally. But, as an individual, she has a strong sense of her worth, and she dictates in a very special way the whole course of her destiny. You feel that, on the surface level, the novel has to do with a conflict between romantic passion and duty.

*Bryson*: Between a great gentleman and his little governess.

*Aldrich*: Yes!

*Bryson*: And that's a very romantic idea in 1847.

*Webster*: Put like that, this sounds typically mid-Victorian; and yet, as handled by Charlotte Bronte, it isn't in the least typical or Victorian or wishy-washy or sentimental, nor do I think it's really a story of romantic love. Would you say so, Mr. Aldrich?

*Aldrich*: No. It is on the surface, but, if you really examine the novel, you realize that there is something more here, and that Jane is really holding out, as it were, for a kind of love which was based not on her physical attraction as a woman—which she doesn't possess—but based upon her real qualities as a servant, as a good woman.

*Bryson*: Is "servant" exactly the word you mean there, Mr. Aldrich? "Servant," perhaps, in the Victorian sense. You mean a person who gives real service?

*Webster*: Dignified service, don't you think?

*Aldrich*: Right!

*Bryson*: But isn't that really one of the most striking things about this book, which puts it almost in a class by itself? You have the typical Victorian melodramatic plot; you have the little orphan girl who's kicked around by her bad step-cousin, so to speak.

*Webster*: By a rich relation!

*Bryson*: A rich relation! She goes to a school, she's starved, she's browbeaten; she makes friends with other little girls who are, well, little angels or little devils. She goes as a governess; she falls in love with this dark-browed romantic, Mr. Rochester. He has an insane wife whom he conceals in the attic. You tell it all that way and it could be something out of a child's fairy tale!

*Webster*: Yes, but Jane is not like the Cinderella original. Jane is completely original. This is established right away, very early in the book, I think in the second chapter, where Jane as a child of ten is questioned by the wicked Mr. Brocklehurst, who becomes the ogre of the school to which she's sent, about whether she is or not a good little girl. He is told that she's a naughty little girl, and he says: "Do you know what happens to naughty little girls?" She says: "Yes, they go to hell"; and he says, "What is hell?" And she says: "A pit full of fire." Then he says: "Well, what must you do to avoid that?" and she says: "Well, I must stay well and not die." Unconventionality is typical of *Jane Eyre* right in the second chapter, and she stays that way till the end of the book.

*Bryson*: Isn't that a most remarkable thing—that this less-than-thirty-year-old girl, Charlotte Bronte, who wrote the book, and who had had, let's say, conventionally little experience, knows how, within the framework of the typical melodrama of her time, to create this little three-dimensional brat of a girl and give her such vitality and reality? There's a kind of wickedness, in the modern sense, about what Charlotte Bronte puts into *Jane Eyre*. I don't mean wickedness in the sense of lack of virtue.

*Webster*: Do you think that Charlotte and Jane are the same people?

*Bryson*: It's an important thing to think about. Are they?

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*Webster*: I would think that Jane is tremendously subjective. I don't mean subjective in the sense of reported experience at all, but as an extension of the extraordinary potentialities which were in Charlotte herself, of the extraordinary character of Charlotte herself.

*Aldrich*: In the absolute sense of artistic creation, I think Jane represents the working out of very deep longings in Charlotte, and she has achieved that working-out in the most completely successful way—which is very rarely come by except in novels of the very first order.

*Bryson*: It was almost unknown at that time, wasn't it, Mr. Aldrich?

*Aldrich*: Yes!

*Bryson*: After all, she did something here that hadn't been done before. Yet, instead of being an experienced, trained, professional writer, she's just a little girl out of a parsonage. What do you mean by her experience, Miss Webster? Conventionally speaking, the tradition is she hadn't had any.

*Webster*: That is just what I mean. She did supposedly go to a school, analogous to the lower school in this novel, but there is no evidence that she ever met a Mr. Rochester or went through all of the experiences or events that happened in this book. But her capacities must have been Jane's capacities; and the measure of Jane's being unique in literature, in so far as we grant that she had no predecessors, must also be the measure of Charlotte's own extraordinary imaginative capacity. Don't you think so?

*Aldrich*: Yes! She had the capacity to use totally what limited experience she had.

*Bryson*: What is the conflict, Mr. Aldrich, that you were talking about? What is it basically? A conflict between romantic love and principle is, after all, the oldest conflict in fiction. How is it different here?

*Aldrich*: It seems to me that you don't have the conflict between *romantic* passion as such and duty. The passion is not romantic at all. It's a religious passion, and that that is the passion which energizes the novel and gives it such sublimity and force.

*Bryson*: What do you mean by "religious" in this connection?

*Aldrich*: Well, Jane is holding out, all through the novel, to serve God.

*Bryson*: Not Mr. Rochester?

*Aldrich*: I think at the end Rochester becomes the God-man. He becomes the acceptable earthly substitute for the spiritual God.

*Bryson*: You're getting a bit Freudian now!

*Aldrich*: Maybe I am, but, of course, one is tempted to go Freudian on this book. If we just knew a little bit more about Charlotte we could be beautifully Freudian.

*Bryson*: Well, now, let's consider that conflict as basic in the book. When Jane finds that Mr. Rochester is going to marry her (and they undoubtedly love each other very much) except that the screaming and terrible creature hidden up in the attic is really Mr. Rochester's legitimate, although very evil wife who ought to die but

doesn't, Jane, penniless and helpless—that's the way women were in those days—and with absolutely no way of going on her own, goes out and risks starvation and disgrace rather than be the bigamous wife of the man she loves. Now, that looks on the surface, Mr. Aldrich, like a mere refusal to be taken advantage of in a most romantic and melodramatic way. And you're saying it's religious.

*Aldrich*: I think it is to some extent. She's adhering to principle in a very conventional way. But under that she wants to be loved for the particular kind of girl she is. You remember how she reacts violently to Rochester's attempts to dress her up and make her into the sort of woman that he's known in the past, preparing her for a life of mistresshood. She doesn't want that. She wants all the way along, as Charlotte (sic) wanted, to be loved for what she was and for the qualities which she had shown Rochester.

*Bryson*: And for the service that she can show him.

*Aldrich*: For the service she can show him.

*Bryson*: So, when Rochester gets banged up, that gives her her chance.

*Aldrich*: Precisely! Now, it's no longer a life of physical passion. It's a life of service in which her qualities as a governess and as an unattractive but very fine girl will come out in best display.

*Webster*: Also, it's the expression of an immensely maternal feeling, which is so common to so many women, and which, I think, has given Jane one of the qualities with which so many women readers identify themselves.

*Aldrich*: Yes, she's every woman.

*Webster*: And she has had thousands of successors (though no predecessors), Maggie Wylie being one. She's become a very popular type, but she wasn't when Charlotte wrote.

*Bryson*: No, women were supposed to be a little less assertive about their service qualities before this book was written. What about the reality of the other characters? If Jane has this tremendous impressiveness, which you feel when you read the book, fighting your way through this rather difficult, rhetorical quality of the Victorian style, how about Rochester himself, this beetle-browed, square-shouldered he-man?

*Webster*: Well, there's something about Rochester which I think also is extraordinarily attractive to most people. Part of the charm of the book is that Jane and Mr. Rochester begin to be attractive to each other, or so I feel, by the fact that neither of them is a conventional individual, neither of them fits into quite the conventional pigeon-hole, although Mr. Rochester is nearer to it. But, heavens, we've met many of those beetle-browed heroes who are not conventionally handsome or beautiful in the romantic sense of the word, who are forbidding, who are rude and abrupt and brusque, but who have a tremendous maleness—and also, in Mr. Rochester's case, an interesting mind as well as the maleness.

*Bryson*: But isn't that partly romantic, too, Miss Webster?

*Webster*: Of course it's partly romantic! Why wouldn't it be? But it seems to me that, although the conventions of Mr. Rochester

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are more in the romantic Victorian vein, he, too, has a tremendously sturdy reality.

*Bryson*: Well, when you get beyond those two, what about the rest of them? What about this poor, crazy, vicious creature up in the attic who's trying to murder everybody, whom Rochester had to marry, got tricked into marrying—this awful spectre behind the scenes? Is she real?

*Aldrich*: She's right out of the Gothic tradition!

*Webster*: She's the camel you have to swallow, I think.

*Bryson*: You're not convinced by her? She's just evil.

*Aldrich*: No. You're not convinced by her, first of all, because you see so little of her. But she is evil incarnate, and I think that, dramatically, she serves her purpose in the novel.

*Webster*: Yes, it's a plot necessity. Charlotte doesn't try to examine her in any subjective sense, does she?

*Bryson*: What about Mr. St. John Rivers, who is the great missionary, who wants Charlotte (sic) to go with him as a sort of platonic wife.

*Webster*: I don't believe in him at all!

*Aldrich*: He's one of the weaker characters in the book.

*Bryson*: Well, are you saying then that Charlotte Bronte was able to create these major characters, full and rounded and powerful, but that the decoration of other characters is not as skillful?

*Webster*: Oh, not entirely so! I think some of the minor characters are extremely round—Bessie, the nurse, for instance, and Mrs. Reed, the wicked aunt; Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper; and little Adele, the child. A great many of them, even the little coachmen who come in for a few lines, as we'd say in my medium, are round. But I think the first Mrs. Rochester and Mr. Rivers, also the beautiful ladies with whom Jane is thrown into contrast, perhaps deliberately, Blanche Ingham and Rosamond Oliver, are in very, very flat dimension.

*Aldrich*: They aren't entirely flat. They manage to take on a dramatic roundness because Jane has the kind of talent which gives you the human inconsistencies of all these people.

*Bryson*: You've identified Charlotte with Jane so much that you're talking now about Jane writing her own book.

*Aldrich*: I know! I know!

*Bryson*: You mean Charlotte Bronte has this kind of talent when she wrote about Jane.

*Aldrich*: Yes, she had.

*Webster*: Well, now, you talked about Charlotte marrying Mr. Rochester.

*Bryson*: I know I did! I know!

*Webster*: Does this mean that there actually is a very deep identification, or do we imagine it?

*Bryson*: I don't doubt that there is. But let me go back to something which fascinated me in the book and which you brought up, I think, Mr. Aldrich. How can a girl who's lived this outwardly nar-

row life get such a grasp on so deep a human problem and write such a book? It's an old problem.

*Aldrich*: It's a very old problem! All the young people who want to write are asking that question.

*Bryson*: Well, when you teach youngsters to write—I'm sure that is part of your job, Mr. Aldrich—don't they say to you: "Well, I can't write because I have not yet been a dock walloper, I have not yet gone to China, I have not yet fallen in love with six women and lost five of them"? What do you say?

*Aldrich*: Whenever they begin feeling sorry for themselves, you point to the Bronte sisters. They were writers who really had no discernible experience to speak of and yet produced masterpieces.

*Bryson*: What's the answer?

*Aldrich*: Well, it's clear, that both the Bronte sisters used their experience in a very total way, and that all of the material, all the significant material, in *Jane Eyre* is part of Charlotte's life.

*Bryson*: In imagination?

*Aldrich*: Yes! She was immensely aware, and she had this "complete capacity for experience," which Henry James speaks of as an indispensable faculty for a writer to have.

*Bryson*: Then, experience can roll over people who don't have that faculty?

*Webster*: It's not entirely a matter of experience, I think. The problem presents itself in my profession to some extent. Actors think that they have to have done something in order to do it on the stage. Well, it would be too bad if you had to commit a murder in order to play *Macbeth*. It's the imaginative capacity for experiencing certain passions, certain emotions, that is the important thing in any art, is it not?

*Aldrich*: Yes, and I think that in Charlotte's case she got all the insight she needed into the romantic emotion as a result of her experience in Belgium.

*Bryson*: And she said something to women that still means a great deal? You said Jane Eyre had lots of successors, Miss Webster. Was it nine years ago that you read *Jane Eyre*?

*Webster*: Something like that. I read the whole book from beginning to end with very few cuts over this CBS network. I used to read thirty minutes every morning at nine-fifteen, a horrible hour!

*Bryson*: And people listened?

*Webster*: I used to get the most extraordinary letters. I got hundreds of letters and, obviously, there were people who listened every day. There must be tremendous plot value in the book, apart from the character value, to fascinate people as it did. I still get letters to this day, or, when I go out of New York, I meet people who speak of how wonderful they thought the book was and how faithfully they used to follow it—people who were blind, people away in the back woods, housewives washing dishes, people driving to their work in the morning. It had an immense, faithful, and fascinated audience.

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*Bryson:* Were those people who had not known the book before, Miss Webster?

*Webster:* I think the great majority of them were. Perhaps a number of them had read it long ago when they were children and hadn't remembered it particularly well.

*Bryson:* What I'm trying to get at is the most important point: what *Jane Eyre* means to a modern reader. When *Jane Eyre* was read, with your great skill, people found it a new book and it wasn't a mere literary response that you got.

*Webster:* By no manner of means! In fact, I think it was least of all a consciously literary response, but a natural response to a book which is, with all its faults, great literature. I think that it held them, partly, as I say, because it has as good a plot as any soap opera that I ever listened to—maybe it should have been called "*Jane Eyre Faces Life*"—and also because of the identification of the average woman listener with Jane.

*Aldrich:* Yes, she emancipates all women from whatever torment they happen to be involved in at the moment.

*Bryson:* You mean that they can have romantic dreams or that they can see themselves within the realistic context of their lives as more masterful people?

*Aldrich:* Yes. They can see themselves as capable, as helping themselves, and shaping their destiny now.

*Bryson:* Because Jane controlled her destiny, they see that they can control theirs?

*Aldrich:* Yes!

*Webster:* And through Jane they see themselves as very admirable and also very amusing characters. I think that the comedy in Jane and in the book isn't usually sufficiently stressed.

*Bryson:* What kind of comedy do you mean? You don't mean comedy of character.

*Webster:* Well, irony, if you like. But she had a sense of humor that was unique, surely, in a Victorian woman of that type.

*Bryson:* About herself particularly.

*Webster:* About herself, even about Mr. Rochester. And having a sense of humor about the man you're in love with is a fairly rare quality.

*Aldrich:* Yes, and there is sheer satire. I'm always delighted with those scenes at the beginning where Brocklehurst, for one, is introduced. And some of the antics of the Reed family are awfully good fun; but they have a terribly sharp edge.

*Webster:* Oh, they do, indeed!

*Bryson:* And the edge registers with you still, does it? I mean, they don't seem to you just sort of little marionettes moved around in an antique setting?

*Webster:* I don't think so. I don't think they seem like Aunt Sallys at all. For instance, at the beginning of the book, when you're introduced to the ogre, Brocklehurst, and Jane is put through those first hideous experiences when she first gets to the Lowood school, you think that this is going to be a real *Oliver Twist* workhouse, but



it isn't. There come in characters who have humanity and who have roundness, and you end by believing in Lowood School instead of thinking of it merely as an instrument of torture devised to put Jane on the spot.

*Aldrich*: Well, I don't think I would believe in Helen Burns.

*Bryson*: She's too angelic?

*Webster*: She is a little angelic.

*Aldrich*: Charlotte had in mind, I believe, one of her younger sisters, and was probably overwhelmed with affection.

*Bryson*: You believe in fantastic evil but not in fantastic good?

*Aldrich*: It's much harder to depict.

*Bryson*: I suppose it is.

*Webster*: Well, fantastic evil is more interesting anyway. Fantastic good is apt to be wishy-washy, and that's the distinguishing characteristic of Jane, I think—she is not fantastic good and not wishy-washy.

*Bryson*: Yet how deeply and profoundly you respond to Jane. You feel this is the real person. Would this book have been better—this is a completely speculative question—would this book be better now if it could be rewritten in the more modern realistic tradition? If you got rid of the Victorian rhetoric?

*Aldrich*: I think the rhetoric is indispensable.

*Webster*: I do, too. I think it makes the picture complete. One of the things which Charlotte herself wins from it, whether by accident or design, is the contrast of her own simplicity with her own rhetoric. My favorite sentence in the whole book comes at the end of this immense, turbulent, powerful story, after all the things these two people have gone through. That opening sentence in the last chapter is: "Reader, I married him."

*Bryson*: And what she married at that time, of course, is satisfactory to those young romantics who want to give her her chance to devote herself to her mostly blind and thoroughly maimed hero, and it also fulfills Mr. Aldrich's demand that what she really wanted to be was a woman who is loved for herself and who had a chance to show in service the strength and power and devotion of her own character—the essentially important religious impulse.

# MILL

## The Subjection of Women

T. V. SMITH • HELEN HYATT WALLER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I was reminded, when I reread this essay of Mill's, of the fact that the way men and women treat each other is one of the things that we most take for granted. It's not surprising that the eloquent and searching and almost brutal challenges of Mill against the presuppositions of his time created the scandal that they did. Yet I wonder if we don't presume quite as falsely now, as the men of a hundred years ago presumed that they were very good to women when, as a matter of fact, Mill showed that they were brutal and inconsiderate.

*Smith:* I daresay Mrs. Waller will have something to say about that when she gets a chance. But, before we do justice to women, I'd like to do justice to men. I picked up a copy of the current number of *Look* magazine and *Look* takes a good look at you, Dr. Bryson, and it gives a very fine tribute to this program that you and I helped start with other people eleven years ago. This picture of yours is too young, however.

*Bryson:* That picture, of course, is gross flattery.

*Smith:* I think it's a compliment to *Look* as well as to the program that it rates this very nice notice.

*Bryson:* Thank you very much, Mr. Smith, for embarrassing me! I hope Dr. Crothers has seen that.

*Smith:* I'm sure he has!

*Bryson:* If you will get back to Mr. Mill and justice to women, Mr. Smith.

*Smith:* I will get back to it! This book is one of the important books of all time. It has made a profound and lasting impression on me, because Mill maintains on the first page of this book—and this is what he's after—that the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes is wrong in itself, that it is one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, and that it ought to

be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side nor disability on the other. It's that keynote of power in human relations that has impressed me greatly about this book.

*Waller*: It gets even more challenging, I think, when Mill goes on to show that the equality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest.

*Bryson*: Shows or says, Mrs. Waller? Do you think that's true?

*Waller*: I think he does both. For example, he says that no other class of dependents have had their characters so entirely distorted from their natural proportions by their relation with their masters.

*Bryson*: Their masters being their husbands and fathers?

*Waller*: Apparently yes.

*Bryson*: Particularly their husbands.

*Waller*: I think he is talking about men and women in all relationships. But I'd like to ask you two men what you think about this statement of Mill's: he says the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal.

*Smith*: Well, I wonder if women can tolerate the idea of living with an equal any more than men can?

*Waller*: Well, they haven't had a chance to find out yet.

*Smith*: Who wants to live with an equal?

*Bryson*: Are you suggesting, Mr. Smith, that a woman brought up in good Victorian times—the kind of women that Mill knew and was writing about—preferred to live with superiors?

*Smith*: I suspect they preferred to live as superiors rather than with superiors.

*Bryson*: Is he being just a little bit doubtful of the truth of Mr. Mill's indictment, Mrs. Waller?

*Waller*: I hope to find out.

*Smith*: Oh, no, I'm baiting Mrs. Waller! I think Mill's thesis is a perfectly good one, but it's wider than he makes it out to be. He thinks that men seek superiority. I think it's *human* to seek superiority. No man or woman who ever lived can keep his morale without thinking himself or herself to be superior in some regard to somebody else.

*Waller*: But can't you get that out of your relationships with people as people? Does it always have to come out of this relationship between man and woman? I admit that the kind of loneliness that would come to a man unable to go home and have his wife think he was the lord of all creation might have some deleterious effect on his work, but I wonder if it doesn't, on the contrary, keep the man from doing his best work if he can always go home and feel that he's king.

*Bryson*: You're saying that in this respect the wife takes the place that the mother has taken in the earlier phase of man's existence?

*Waller*: Even more importantly and generally, I'm saying that society—and I'm saying this with Mill—society loses a great deal. Man perhaps doesn't do his best work when he's got the warmth of this home situation where he rules, and woman isn't contributing as much as she could to the general extent of human knowledge if she's

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having to spend so much of her creative energy just doing what the man wants her to do.

*Bryson:* Let's take a look at the way it was ninety years ago, Mrs. Waller, and compare it with today—even though the assumptions that I spoke of in the beginning may still be running in my mind. Women had no property rights. They had no political rights. They had no rights over their children. If a woman inherited property it became her husband's, and she had nothing to say about it. It was only by special contract that a woman had any property rights at all.

*Smith:* She had no right of divorce.

*Bryson:* She had absolutely no legal or political rights. Now, Mill said you've got to get rid of these legal disabilities. He said that society, by imposing these specific disabilities on a little more than half the human race—man is the most neglected of minorities, Mrs. Waller—imposes handicaps that keep people from doing what they can with their strength and their power and their ability, and that if you remove the handicaps then everything will be all right. Now, those handicaps were there, weren't they?

*Waller:* They were!

*Bryson:* And they did distort women?

*Waller:* Yes!

*Bryson:* But were women without power in mid-Victorian times?

*Waller:* Well, that brings up the key point that Mill makes. That is, if you don't have liberty, you seek for power. He shows what a corrupting influence this is not only on the character of the man and of the woman but on all society.

*Smith:* Yes, the contrast is between responsibility and power. If you have power without responsibility, as, legally speaking, men did have, then you misuse your power. If you have the responsibility, as women had, without the power, then you can't discharge your responsibility. So the relationships that ought to rest on principles of justice and *noblesse oblige* and duty were poisoned by not having power and responsibility tied together in some equal fashion on both sides of the sex line.

*Waller:* I'd like to come back to your point for just a minute, Mr. Bryson. You point out that these legal disabilities have all been removed, and still the inequality exists between men and women.

*Bryson:* I didn't say so. I was asking if it did.

*Waller:* Well, I'm admitting it and I want to say quite frankly that before I read Mill I would have been on the defensive in this broadcast, thinking that women had perfect equality under law and that they weren't using it. I would have felt that it was up to the women, and that they had not used the opportunities that had been given to them.

*Bryson:* In other words, what Mill asked for has happened.

*Waller:* It has happened—legally.

*Bryson:* Certainly, women are not as badly off as they were. They have admission to professions, haven't they?

*Waller:* Yes.

*Bryson*: They have the same rights in the divorce courts as men have, and they have equal access to political power.

*Waller*: They do have, and they aren't using it as equals. Why not? Well, that's where Mill becomes very interesting, because he tries to show how the character of women—their personalities, their whole development—has been distorted by the social situation into which they're born.

*Smith*: Mill was the heir, as you'll remember, of the great utilitarian tradition in philosophy and of the whole reform movement for the extension of liberty through the application of equality. When he was about twenty or twenty-one, Mill was engaged in the whole reform movement, and one night he asked himself, after attending a meeting and stirring up agitation, "Suppose that I waked up in the morning and found all of the reforms I've been advocating already consummated, would I be happy?" Happiness, you know, was the utilitarian test of the good life. And he had to answer, "No, I would not be happy," and he had a nervous breakdown over that discovery. Now, Mill is undertaking, in this essay on women, exactly that same element of reform. He was interested in the extension of liberty, as you know. And liberty can be extended only by broadening the base of equality. He picked on women only because they happened to be the ones who were most discriminated against in his time as a class. He connects his philosophy as a whole, his love of liberty, with the woman's cause in order to try to bring about a reform, which, even if it could have been brought about as it has been brought about, would not have left Mill happy.

*Bryson*: Well, to continue with Mill for just a minute, Mr. Smith—after all the man here does count for something—was Mill a man who could have been happy in any society? Mill's taking women as the central point in his attempt to reform society in the name of liberty had something to do with his own temperament. His own relations to women were not usual.

*Smith*: Well, he didn't marry until he was forty-five. Then he married a woman that he'd long been very friendly with, but whose husband was living and with whom his relation apparently was quite overt.

*Bryson*: And somewhat scandalous in the eyes of a lot of his friends.

*Smith*: Well, it was in Victorian times. But Mill was in a certain sense effeminate himself in his attitude toward social relationships based on power. I mean that as a compliment, but also as a description of Mill. His life with this woman, Mrs. Taylor, who became his wife very late, was one of the ideals of all time in terms of men and women. But he saw how much the world lost by her not being able to get the credit which she had to get only through him.

*Waller*: It would be interesting to know how many more books, how many more classics, there are for which women are secondarily responsible.

*Bryson*: Well, Mill is very specific about that, Mrs. Waller. He would like to know how many men have taken ideas which women

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have had, which women were not capable of developing because they lacked the training and the education, but which the men, having the education, picked up and made great books out of. He says, as far as he's concerned, a great many. Didn't his friends doubt the influence that Mrs. Taylor had?

*Waller*: Yes, but that was inevitable at that time because of the whole social situation, which made people look aghast at this relationship. But the point here, Mr. Bryson, is the most challenging of all, and it is how much richer society would be if women were allowed to develop their intellectual capacities, their personalities, to the same extent that men are. I'm not arguing now for women to get something more to satisfy women. I'm picking up Mill's argument that the wealth of human knowledge and understanding is being reduced by half as long as women are being forced into the kind of time-wasting that they are forced into.

*Smith*: You know, Mrs. Waller, this puzzles me very greatly. Mill advocated legal reforms, which have come about.

*Bryson*: All of them!

*Smith*: And he was not blind to the fact that this wouldn't cure all of the ills of society. But why hasn't the equalization of women under law done more toward removing the social restrictions?

*Waller*: Because these restrictions begin when a child is born. All the trend of modern culture is away from the Victorian idea that you are what you are because of birth. You're supposed to be what you are because of your abilities. Yet, when a child is born, a boy or a girl, immediately in the family group the feeling is nurtured that there are certain professions, certain ways, that the man can follow, that the woman will not follow. This attitude is carried on into school and college. I've been reading, looking forward to today's conversation, what we teach some of our people in women's colleges. We are not educating women in a search for truth. We are educating women to be women.

*Bryson*: Don't they educate men to be men?

*Waller*: They educate men to be human beings. There's nothing in the high school or college training of a man that keeps saying, "You are a man, therefore, you must learn this." It's "You are a human being. This is the whole field of human knowledge, your search for truth!" Yet you look at women's programs and you see the woman's side stressed all the time. You are to be this special thing because you are a woman. I think it is a waste of our young people's natural austerity and search for the good and the true to distort it by sex.

*Bryson*: What you are saying, Mrs. Waller, is that Mill, if he were alive today, would not only be unhappy because he couldn't be happy except in reform anyway, but he'd be unhappy because the reforms that happened had happened but haven't worked. The legal restraints are gone, but for some reason or other—perhaps it goes back to that sentence you read—women still live under a handicap.

*Smith*: I have a suspicion which troubles me no little, Mrs. Waller, that the reason why removal of legal disabilities has not led

to the equality of women with men in opportunities is that women don't want the kind of liberty that Mill wanted them to have.

*Waller*: I don't think that's true, Mr. Smith, and I don't think you can say it is because they have never had it. How could they know whether they wanted it or not?

*Bryson*: You mean they've been taught not to want it?

*Waller*: Yes!

*Bryson*: By men?

*Waller*: Yes!

*Bryson*: No, by their mothers!

*Waller*: Well, by their society, the society in which they're bred.

*Bryson*: Why are mothers so indiscriminately the channels for this bad social position that society imposes upon women? After all, it is the mother that distorts the relation between the sexes in their babyhood.

*Waller*: It's because her relation with her husband is distorted, from Mill's point of view.

*Bryson*: Then it isn't a legal problem?

*Waller*: No!

*Bryson*: What is it?

*Waller*: It's social. It's training.

*Bryson*: And you think Mill was right when he said it was founded originally upon force?

*Waller*: I don't know. I think it's a very intriguing idea and one that would be great fun to explore right now in all kinds of situations. For example, I gather from Mill that he believes much of race prejudice is based on the feeling one man has that he's got to be better than somebody else, and on his inability to live as an equal. But there's another thing that worries me even more. I wonder if the children aren't brought up on this from the day they're born. Their mother hasn't had a chance to develop her own individuality and intellectual power as a human being, and yet she has new minds to mold. I'm sure many of her frustrations come out in the characters of those children.

*Smith*: I daresay that's true as a matter of simple fact, but all over the world, in all time, for whatever reason, women have been subordinated to men, not always to their husbands, but, even where they own the property, to the male members of their own family. There probably is a reason deeper than Mill himself has discerned why this keeps on being true in spite of all that you do about it. It's like the hero of an old English ballad—when his legs were shot away he fought still upon the stumps.

*Bryson*: Prejudice is very much like the old English soldier who faded from the bottom as you say.

*Smith*: I have the impression, Mrs. Waller, that most women would count it a larger adventure in the creative life to bear a child and rear a child, than to do all of the things that the term "legal equality" suggests.

*Waller*: But she can so easily do both, Mr. Smith! She's had the

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ability to develop in one area and not at all the ability to develop in other areas.

*Bryson:* Now let's look calmly at that confident statement of yours, Mrs. Waller—and I say this with some trepidation, knowing that you have done both, and that you have two children who are not lacking in mother care or in anything else the children ought to have. Are they of the same sex?

*Waller:* Yes, both boys.

*Smith:* And are they going to treat women properly?

*Waller:* That remains to be seen!

*Bryson:* But isn't Mr. Smith raising a question that has to be faced even though it may properly be dismissed, as you dismiss it? Certainly there are two things which no legislation can change. One is the division of labor based upon biology, which goes straight back into the most primitive times. Women had to stay around the home to take care of the children. The men could take to the hunt and the fighting, and that wasn't by choice, although the men chose it. The other is the economic limitation; a very large proportion of the women in the world today just don't have enough money to put the incidental and trivial care of their children off on somebody else so that they can do their job in a profession. Now, how would you handle those two things?

*Waller:* We live in an age of great specialization. The more I see of young mothers and of my own inability sometimes to cope with my problems—because I just wasn't trained well enough—I wonder why the most important function of all, the rearing of young children, is left in the hands of such rank amateurs. We're specialists in everything else.

*Smith:* Because affection is thought to be more important than efficiency.

*Waller:* But there is more than affection. Any young mother with two or three children to care for twenty-four hours a day often loses her temper, sometimes behaves like a fishwife, and at other times is overly protective, because she's compensating in an area where she hasn't had complete development. As I see children being raised today I think that we might do a better job of it.

*Smith:* How?

*Waller:* The mother might be given a chance, before she marries, to develop herself in such a way that she wouldn't need to over-compensate, or be overly protective, or be overly frustrated by being kept in the kitchen. Secondly, we might have young children in day nurseries so mothers might have a few hours a day at least.

*Bryson:* Doesn't that, even so, condemn some women to be servants and nurses?

*Waller:* But specialists! It can be a terribly exciting thing, the most exciting thing in the world, to be a nursery school teacher or to have the care of small children.

*Smith:* Well, no doubt it can be very exciting business.

*Bryson:* Terrifying in some ways, I should say!

*Smith:* Mill himself, though, has the sound thesis that you can't



get any other kind of justice until you've got legal justice. He went out to get legal justice for women by equality. He's got it. And now we can tackle in whatever way we can, the limitations that remain.

*Bryson*: As a matter of fact, I think we have in this country some things which Mill would very much dislike, Mr. Smith. Mill, as you know, particularly in his essay on liberty, was very much afraid of what we nowadays call the welfare state and, although there have been welfare states before this without women suffrage, I don't think one can doubt that women's political share in our destiny now has been one of the strongest forces that has brought about the welfare state that Mill feared because he thought it would destroy character.

*Waller*: One more point on women. I shouldn't admit this, but it occurs to me that there is nothing a man can do, except perhaps lead a symphony orchestra that can even compare with the joy and satisfaction a woman gets out of bearing children and raising them. Maybe all this is a conspiracy on the part of women to keep men from feeling too terribly inferior!

*Smith*: I think we will survive any feeling of inferiority which we have!

*Bryson*: Do you think that man's age-long and—I am told by women—unbearably insolent assumption of superiority is really a fear that perhaps they don't have the best of it, Mrs. Waller?

*Waller*: Oh, no! It's women's technique to keep them from ever feeling too inferior. Biologically they are so inferior that women had to construct this whole ideology to keep them from feeling too inferior!

*Bryson*: What happens then when women dominate the professions, as they undoubtedly will in the future, and business, and public affairs, and education, and yet go on being the one chosen half of the human race that can bear children?

*Waller*: Maybe that will so excite men to develop their own best intellectual capabilities that they will stage a come-back that will finally put women in their rightful place.

*Bryson*: What's that?

*Waller*: We'll wait and see!

*Bryson*: I thought for a moment you were suggesting that the rightful place, after all, is the subordinate one.

*Waller*: It's just a matter of equality, the thing that Mill brings up again and again and again—that people should be what they can be, through their own abilities, and not be prejudged by their sex.

*Bryson*: I think in justice to Mill we ought to acknowledge that he would be the first to say that, although legal equality was necessary, legal equality didn't solve the whole problem.

# RACINE

## Phèdre

CLIFTON FADIMAN • EVA Le GALLIENNE • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In this, as in most of his plays, Racine took for his theme an old legend which had been talked about and written about for a great many hundreds of years—the legend of a woman cursed by Venus with a love for her stepson. This woman, Phèdre, was also unfortunate enough to have been married to that rather priggish Athenian hero, Theseus, the founder of the city and the hero of many amorous as well as heroic episodes. Of course, what she did was only to say to her stepson, when she'd heard the rumor that her husband, the boy's father, was dead, that she loved him. As the result, a whole chain of tragedy is unloosed. The boy gets killed and Phèdre kills herself. Now, that's the old legend. Racine takes it and puts it into the framework of French ideas and moralities of the seventeenth century—a stiff setting for it. Nevertheless, we're told by French people that the passion somehow breaks through.

*Fadiman:* Yes, I think to us, Dr. Bryson, who read it today, it's pretty hard to feel that passion breaking through these stiff though very beautiful lines—Alexandrines as they were called. But perhaps they had a different conception of what the drama was in the time of Louis XIV than we who have been brought up on Shakespeare have. These plays, written by Racine, his predecessor Corneille, and others of the period, are not, as I see it, the kind of play that we are used to. They are mere logical expositions of character and viewpoint, expressed in beautiful, measured, rhyming lines.

*Bryson:* It's not action, Mr. Fadiman?

*Fadiman:* Not action in our sense of the word. By that I mean that the French dramatists, Racine among them, were bound by what they thought of as the three unities—of time, place, and action. All the action had to take place within a presumed period of, I think, thirty-six hours. The scene could not change, and the action itself had to be single. Because of these three limitations, all the audience wit-

nessed was the climax of a situation, developed in one place, within a very short period of time. That's very different from Shakespeare, who transports us from one country to another, and from one time to another, who has in *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, over thirty different scenes. These are two different conceptions of drama, and when we read Racine we must try to understand the limitations within which he worked.

*LeGallienne*: That's true, and you find that Racine, to us in this country, seems very cold and very remote. Don't you think so?

*Fadiman*: Yes—the frigidaire of drama.

*LeG*: Of course, in France, particularly at that period, he was considered quite passionate as compared with Corneille.

*Fadiman*: Well, Corneille was even colder!

*LeG*: Yes, he was. He was very noble.

*Bryson*: Corneille was almost absolute zero and Racine warmed it up a bit.

*LeG*: The amazing thing is that if you see this played, it has warmth, although I must say it must be played by a consummate actress. I had the good fortune to see Bernhardt play *Phèdre*, and the whole theatre was imbued with such violence and such passion and such excitement that it seems impossible for us to imagine that that could be. And yet it is possible, because I have seen it done.

*Bryson*: But now look, Miss LeGallienne, isn't it important to figure out just what that excitement is? I never saw Bernhardt do *Phèdre*, I saw her do *Athalie* and it's the same sort of thing. What is that excitement which is communicated? Is it the same sort of thing we get out of Shakespeare?

*Fadiman*: Don't you think that the educated Frenchman and Frenchwoman get a certain excitement, Miss LeGallienne, out of mere language beautifully arranged?

*LeG*: Yes, that is true. But, in Bernhardt's performance—of course, I was very young at the time and perhaps for that reason might have been even more hyper-critical than I would be today. . . .

*Bryson*: Also more excitable, Miss LeGallienne.

*LeG*: I don't think so. I was completely swept away, as was everybody in that theatre. People were crying. It wasn't just a thing of intellectual appreciation. French people adore listening to intelligent conversation. Even in life you can hear them talking for hours, and they will listen to people discussing a certain scene for hours on end. Their conversation is beautifully phrased. They appreciate the language; they appreciate the words as well as the idea.

*Fadiman*: The rhetoric of one taxi driver berating another in a Paris street is a delight to listen to.

*LeG*: Yes, magnificent!

*Bryson*: Well, that's the tradition. Now, what was Racine getting at with this play? He took this old story in which a woman is fated to have a love which she cannot fulfill. It's a genuine love. She's passionately in love with her stepson. At the same time she hates herself, and she hates Venus for having put this curse upon her. What is he trying to show?

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*LeG*: Don't you think she's one of the greatest puritans that ever lived perhaps?

*Bryson*: Well, will you agree, Miss LeGallienne, that Racine was essentially a moralist?

*LeG*: Of course! He was brought up by the Jansenists, wasn't he?

*Bryson*: Yes, and he was trying to tell a moral story. Now, he couldn't say, "Don't fall in love with your grandson or your stepson," because the poor lady didn't want to.

*LeG*: But she was cursed by Venus, wasn't she?

*Fadiman*: Therefore it wasn't her fault.

*LeG*: But don't you think it would be a very comfortable thing if you ever had an evil inclination to say, "Well, that has nothing to do with me. That's some curse I have!"

*Fadiman*: Don't you think that's exactly what we all do?

*Bryson*: We pay the psychiatrist to tell us that!

*LeG*: Ah, yes, we've changed the names of things.

*Fadiman*: The god has changed his name—he's now called the unconscious.

*Bryson*: Well, he's only trying to show then that a puritan can, by some quirk of fate, suffer this incestuously intentional passion.

*LeG*: After all, what did she do?

*Bryson*: Nothing!

*LeG*: Phèdre was an extremely virtuous woman actually. If she had been an evil woman she would have felt this passion and delighted in it and there wouldn't have been any trouble about it.

*Bryson*: In the legend, Miss LeGallienne, she did something which was very evil. She accused her stepson of having tried to assault her.

*LeG*: That was definitely a lie.

*Fadiman*: It was a lie, and Racine, again the moralist, and also the snob, introduces what is in effect a new character, the nurse, of lower social order, who precipitates the plot by explaining to Hippolytus that Phèdre is in love with him. In other words, Phèdre is relieved from all guilt. She never makes an avowal of incestuous love.

*LeG*: The nurse is also the one who tells Theseus and accuses Hippolytus.

*Bryson*: That's right!

*Fadiman*: So the nurse really is the villain, if there is one.

*LeG*: Yes!

*Bryson*: Racine didn't quite have the heart to make this woman, whom he had a good deal of attachment for, the villainess that she was.

*LeG*: Of course, she was a princess, too.

*Bryson*: She was a princess, and princesses didn't do such things?

*LeG*: No, at least not at that period.

*Fadiman*: Well, we must remember that these plays were played before the court of the king.

*LeG*: That's right!

*Fadiman*: And by implication the king and the court had to be flattered in them, so no princess could do too evil a thing.

*LeG*: No.

*Fadiman*: It would have been an insult.

*Bryson*: Well, then, really no crime is committed?

*Fadiman*: No crime is committed. There's only the intention to commit what is not in effect even a legal crime; because you must remember that Hippolytus, though he was her stepson, had no degree of consanguinity at all.

*Bryson*: That's right!

*LeG*: Not only that, but, when she told him of her love, she thought her husband was dead.

*Fadiman*: Yes, so there wasn't even a question of adultery. She was about as innocent and unfortunate a heroine as we've encountered on this program for a long time.

*Bryson*: And yet she precipitates this long series of disasters. Theseus is embittered. Hippolytus goes out and gets killed by his beloved horses because Neptune fulfills the wish of Theseus. Phèdre kills herself. C  none, the nurse, kills herself. As is general in the French classical drama, the corpses don't heap up on the stage, but they heap up in the wings.

*LeG*: That's right!

*Bryson*: Nevertheless, there's a considerable pile of corpses. What does it prove? You see, with a dramatist like Shakespeare, I shouldn't say, "What does it prove?"

*LeG*: He *really* heaps the corpses on the stage.

*Bryson*: But with somebody like Racine, it's different. After all, Racine's life is rather notable in the fact that, after having written a dozen or so masterpieces, he retired from the theatre and became a kind of public relations man for Louis XIV, and spent the rest of his life in rather arid piety.

*Fadiman*: Yes, he's supposed to have become converted back to the original piety of his youth and to have become a kind of non-practicing saint in his later years. I've never believed this.

*Bryson*: You don't think he really was a saint?

*Fadiman*: No, I see here no sign of any of the spiritual intensity of Pascal, for instance.

*LeG*: He wasn't human enough then.

*Bryson*: Then, is his moralism in all these plays really hypocrisy?

*Fadiman*: I don't think it's hypocrisy, I think it's convention.

*Bryson*: Convention?

*LeG*: Yes!

*Bryson*: He didn't really care?

*Fadiman*: It's not quite that. It's just that this is the way in which people had to express themselves in accordance with the moral atmosphere of that time; and so they did. The same thing is true of Euripides. He too expressed the Greek moral ideas of his period. But what I'm getting at is that, because of this convention of morality, there was no spiritual intensity in Racine, either in these plays or

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in the latter two. I think some weeks ago you discussed *Athalie*, one of his religious morality plays.

*LeG*: Yes!

*Fadiman*: But there, too, I feel a conventional piety rather than the true religiousness, let us say, of his contemporary, Pascal.

*Bryson*: Well, there's certainly no Pascal in him, Mr. Fadiman. But that brings us back, doesn't it, to the nature of this excitement, because that is the great puzzle with Racine. We can distinguish it from the excitement with which we respond to Shakespeare. But what is it? You say this "beautiful style." What's beautiful about it?

*LeG*: Well, it has a lot to do with the language. I don't think that, by reading Racine in English, you get the slightest idea of what he's like.

*Fadiman*: I think you get nothing. Not only that, but if you read Racine in English you're quite certain he's a bad writer.

*LeG*: Well, of course, we feel the same way, I think, about reading Shakespeare in French. He is definitely awful in French.

*Fadiman*: A great many people who have read Racine in English have become what might be called anti-Phèdralists instead of Phèdralists.

*Bryson*: I think your frivolity would have offended the pious M. Racine, Mr. Fadiman.

*Fadiman*: I'm afraid puns weren't allowable before . . .

*Bryson*: Not before Louis XIV. I think he would have said "The Sun is not amused." But I should like to know what it sounds like. You've played in the French theatre, Miss LeGallienne. What does it sound like?

*LeG*: Well, I'll read you, for instance, this little bit—Phèdre's invocation to Venus.

*Bryson*: What's the setting of it? Why is she invoking Venus? Venus has done her dirt.

*LeG*: Yes, and she accuses Venus of doing her dirt, too. She says that it's Venus' fault, and she begs Venus to take her revenge on Hippolytus who has never deigned to worship at Venus' altar.

*Bryson*: Well, in the original story, of course, Hippolytus is the central character and it's all Hippolytus' scorn of Venus that brings about the tragedy.

*LeG*: That's right. And because he scorned her, Phèdre says to Venus: "Why don't you revenge yourself, too, on Hippolytus? It isn't just my revenge I want. You should revenge yourself, because he's always had contempt for you." So, she invokes the goddess, and she says:

O toy qui vois la honte où je suis descenduë,  
Implacable Venus, suis-je assez confonduë?  
Tu ne sçaurois plus loin pousser ta cruauté.  
Ton triomphe est parfait; tous tes traits ont porté.  
Cruelle! si tu veux une gloire nouvelle,  
Attaque un ennemi qui te soit plus reveille.

Hippolyte te fuit, et, bravant ton courroux,  
Jamais à tes autels n'a fléchi les genoux;  
Ton nom semble offenser ses superbes oreilles.  
Déesse, vange-toy: nos causes sont pareilles.  
Qu'il aime . . . Mais déjà tu reviens sur tes pas,  
CEnone? On me deteste, on ne t'écoute pas?

—Act III, Scene II

*Fadiman*: The phrasing is wonderful!

*LeG*: Yes, wonderful!

*Fadiman*: Wonderful language, beautifully arranged. The nearest thing to it, to my mind, in our own tongue, is the heroic couplet of Pope, where everything lies in the balance, in the proper use of alliteration, in making the two lines come out in the form of an epigram, as it were. Both Pope and Racine are beautiful in that sense; and that's why they're untranslatable. But it is not passionate, dramatic language in the sense that Shakespeare's language is such.

*Bryson*: It isn't, and yet in the theatre, the warmth and passion is there. We have Miss LeGallienne's testimony for it.

*Fadiman*: And her fine reading!

*Bryson*: And the admiration of generations of Frenchmen.

*LeG*: Of course, I must say that Madame Sarah, although this was supposed to be her greatest role—most people thought it was—never played it without feeling the most enormous terror at the thought of playing it, because she felt it was the most difficult thing that existed for an actress to do, to make this cold medium really glow and pulsate with life.

*Bryson*: Well, then, why didn't she feel that when she played *Athalie*?

*LeG*: *Athalie* isn't as passionate and violent.

*Bryson*: No, *Athalie* is just a wicked old woman.

*LeG*: And, of course, Bernhardt only played *Athalie* at the very end of her life. She played *Phèdre* all through her career.

*Fadiman*: Yes, it was her great role, wasn't it?

*Bryson*: Is it because there is a difficulty not only in making real a passionate character through the lovely rigidity of this verse, but also making real a character so torn between two things as *Phèdre*'s natural puritanism and this cursed passion which the goddess had placed in her heart? Was there something in the complexity of the character, too?

*LeG*: Oh, yes! It was a complex thing, because there was the fury of the passionate love, the fury of jealousy, and the fury against the gods. It was a matter of great suffering, violent suffering, and rage. That's what came from her performance.

*Fadiman*: Yes—the key word in *Phèdre*, repeated again and again and again, is *fureur*, or "fury."

*LeG*: That's right!

*Bryson*: Yes! Fury!

*Fadiman*: Fury! All of these characters are caught in a fury, in a trap set by the gods from which they cannot escape; and their frus-

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tration involves them in explosions of emotion, explosions that occur just at the climactic moment of their lives. These explosions Racine expresses in his gorgeous language. I think that explains the excitement of the play for a Frenchman brought up in the classic tradition. The extraordinary concision of the dramatic moment. This is the last moment of their lives and it's bound to be interesting. Everything happens all at once within the given hour-and-a-half, something like that.

*LeG*: Yes, it's really not very long.

*Fadiman*: A very *economical* play.

*Bryson*: The action begins in the beginning and it ends when it's over. It's very tightly plotted in that sense, although I think you'd agree that, when the crises come, they all talk too much.

*Fadiman*: Not for a Frenchman!

*Bryson*: Not for a Frenchman, no! But to us they seem to talk too much.

*LeG*: The same thing happens in the opera, you know. They always go on and on and on if they're saying goodbye.

*Bryson*: But there you have music! They love music more than they love each other.

*Fadiman*: Well, don't you think it's because the French classic dramatist had a different notion of dialogue than Shakespeare? What Racine aims to do is to exhaust all the points involved in a given situation, just as a rhetorician or lawyer arguing for his client would work out all possible "ayes" and "nays" until the problem had exhausted its possibilities.

*Bryson*: This is what the Frenchman does?

*Fadiman*: That is what the Frenchman does, whereas Shakespeare will in a single line, like Lear's "Pray thee, undo this button," suddenly give us the whole tragedy and pathetic helplessness of an old man. Here, all the speeches are long because they have to be exhaustive. That's why to me these plays are not so much populated by characters as by minds. Here are five or six minds arguing around a table, not unlike the way in which we are arguing around this table.

*Bryson*: With tragedy hanging over them, Mr. Fadiman.

*Fadiman*: Of course! But they don't need any backdrop. There are no scenes. This might just as well be given in a drawing room. In fact, the French drama was a kind of drawing room.

*LeG*: Yes, that's true.

*Fadiman*: This is just exposition—the logical and rhetorical exposition of passion.

*LeG*: I agree with what you're saying, Mr. Fadiman, but do you think it has anything to do with the fact that Shakespeare was an actor and Racine was not? Moliere was also a great actor, and his plays have none of that cold, remote quality. Racine and Corneille were neither of them actors.

*Bryson*: No, they were aristocrats and snobs.

*LeG*: Yes!

*Fadiman*: One other thing to remember is that Moliere, in his best plays, drew his characters from the middle class. They could



afford to be human, whereas the characters in Racine were classic heroes and heroines who had to talk like kings and princes. Therefore, their language and their emotions had to be of a more rarified and abstract character to accord with the social situation.

*Bryson*: All right! Now, what does this mean to us today? Racine succeeded in fitting the Greek classic tradition into the French tradition. What about Racine today? You said, Miss LeGallienne, that he still filled a French theatre audience with excitement.

*LeG*: He does, but I don't see how he could mean very much to us here in America. Can you see that, Mr. Fadiman?

*Fadiman*: I think he can mean nothing. The only enjoyment that one can get from Racine is the enjoyment of reading perfectly matched verse in French, in the original.

*LeG*: It must be read in French!

*Fadiman*: It must be read in French, and it must be read beautifully, aloud, as Miss LeGallienne has done for us now. Otherwise, I think there's nothing there. The characterization seems to us wooden or even steely.

*Bryson*: Do you think that, unless we can read it in French, Mr. Fadiman, we can't get even an insight into the French classical drama or into the survival of that tradition insofar as it is alive in the French theatre today?

*Fadiman*: I think you can get a feeling of its defects.

*Bryson*: But not of its virtue?

*Fadiman*: No.

*Bryson*: You'd warn people away from Racine.

*Fadiman*: I regret to say that I think this is a man you don't have to read unless you can read him in the original. He's quite untranslatable. Everything depends on an exact choice made among a very few words. The curious thing about Racine is that here is a man who achieves the most remarkable rhetorical effects with the fewest number of words. His vocabulary is limited compared with that of Shakespeare, for instance.

*Bryson*: That makes the use of rhymed verse all the more remarkable.

*Fadiman*: An extraordinary artist!

*Bryson*: And with the pervasive beauty he, nevertheless, does get a great variety of effects.

*LeG*: Oh, yes, definitely!

*Bryson*: Although, as you pointed out a while ago, he makes everybody talk the same way.

*LeG*: That's true! Hippolytus is supposed to be quite a barbarian and yet he speaks exactly the same elegant language.

*Fadiman*: That is my point. These are not people talking; these are minds expressing themselves.

*LeG*: Yes, you're right!

*Fadiman*: If you have an abstract mind it will express itself in an abstract language and it doesn't matter whether you are a prince or a princess or a servant or a nurse or whatever. These are abstractions,

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talking abstractions, and it's interesting that the Frenchman in the twentieth century should still be moved by them.

*Bryson*: It would be interesting to know, if we could inquire successfully into such a problem, whether there is in the English tradition anything in which ideas are made so moving and so dramatic. Shakespeare, of course, is full of ideas, but they're enriched and overloaded with all kinds of incident and sheer lyric poetry.

*LeG*: Yes! Yes!

*Fadiman*: Racine is perhaps closer to the Shavian drama, the drama of ideas.

*Bryson*: Closer to it, isn't it? In other words, Shaw, in spite of not wanting to be, is probably a pretty good classicist after all.

*LeG*: Also, it seems to me, Shaw makes all of his characters express Shaw. I don't think, for instance, his women are ever alive as human beings, or very rarely. They're nearly always the mouthpieces for what Shaw wants to say.

*Fadiman*: Well, there's so much in Shaw that the characters have a great deal of differentiation anyway. A great man has many characters in himself.

*LeG*: Yes, of course! He has got so many facets!

*Bryson*: Of course, the only reason for ending a conversation about Racine with a few remarks about Shaw is that Shaw, after all, is our great example of a theatre of ideas, in which Racine was superb in the French tradition.

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# ELIOT

## *The Mill on the Floss*

WALTER COHEN

• JUDITH EVELYN

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: There is one distinction that George Eliot and *The Mill on the Floss* share with Shakespeare, and that's that the book is on practically every list of required reading for every school in the English-speaking world. That puts a kind of obstacle between the appreciative reader and the book itself. It has been compulsory reading for so many people, I suppose most of them dismiss it and think of it never again. Nearly a hundred years ago when it was written, it wasn't considered anything like a standard book. It was fairly daring and rather startling to the Victorian world of that time.

*Cohen*: Yes, and it's a pity, Mr. Bryson, that there should be an obstacle of any nature between the reading public and *The Mill on the Floss*, because, besides it's being on reading lists along with Shakespeare, it has other qualities. George Eliot has other qualities that are common to both her and Shakespeare. *The Mill on the Floss* seems to me for two-thirds of its length unquestionably a work of genius. Then it does turn into a novel and becomes somewhat less satisfying.

*Evelyn*: Well, Mr. Cohen, don't you think that, if for no other reason, it deserves a very distinguished place in literature because it is one of the very first—with the exception of *Adam Bede*, which precedes it about one year—novels that had a real psychological impact, where the interest of the story definitely developed out of the characters themselves, and where those characters were so well limned and lived to such an extent that they became not just characters in a book, but so real that you suddenly find that, in a discussion or sitting around tables, you are talking about people who, you suddenly realize, are just characters which George Eliot has created?

*Cohen*: That's undoubtedly true. I think it's commonly forgotten that George Eliot gave an absolutely new turn to the novel in English, despite all the achievements of her contemporaries. They were among the greatest of English writers—Thackeray and Dickens

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—but she introduced a new note, which was the one developed through the succeeding years. She does have that historic importance in general as a novelist.

*Bryson*: That might wear off in time, Mr. Cohen. We don't care so much about the historical importance of a book like this now. But, is it still a work of genius, in your opinion?

*Cohen*: So I was going to say. That is what gives it its real importance, not so much its historic position as the fact that it is, in its own status, a work of genius.

*Bryson*: But isn't it even the more remarkable that George Eliot didn't find it necessary, as some of the very greatest novelists did—Balzac, for instance—to make the characters more or less symbols of a definite passion? Eliot's people did unexpected things in spite of their depth of feeling, in spite of their passionate conflict with each other. They did things which were unexpected, but that's a subtle way of showing real life, isn't it?

*Evelyn*: The unpredictability of characters and what they do and how they react in certain situations seems to me is true of real life, I believe, Mr. Bryson, in all the ages. George Eliot was able to put her people into their milieu and in their life in such a way that they become extremely interesting people—even to us who are reading her ninety or a hundred years later.

*Bryson*: And after the unexpectedness, Miss Evelyn, we come to the conclusion that it's not so inconsistent after all, that that's the way people really are. There's nothing capricious about the strange way in which these people behave sometimes.

*Cohen*: It's the way these people are! Yes, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: The illusion of reality is not affected by it.

*Cohen*: We can't always predict the specific action of this character or that in the book, but, after an event has taken place, we see, as you say, that it is not inconsistent with what we have so far learned, that the action is simply another stage in the development of the character, and that it emphasizes the picture that has so far been drawn. However, I think to go forward at once into the action of *The Mill on the Floss*, is to bring us into perhaps the weakest and the most doubtful part of the book. To go back into the characters, on the other hand, is to be plunged at once into its highest qualities.

*Bryson*: Well, the action is not particularly elaborate, although it works itself out in a series of the most beautifully dramatic and revealing incidents. It's the story of a miller, a man who owns a mill, who is so stubborn and selfish, in a not ignoble way, that he ruins himself; the story of a girl, his daughter, who is like him, who destroys her own happiness by her impulsiveness, because she's torn between a love for Philip, a brilliant and intellectual hunchback, and Steven Guest, a slightly over-glamorous hero, and her impulsiveness doesn't enable her to make any decision; and Tom, her brother, who's self-righteous and doesn't forgive her, because he doesn't understand her. Now, that as plot, if you can call that plot, is merely a framework in which the vitality of these characters shows itself. Is that right?

*Cohen*: Yes. It's a plot that, it seems to me, comes into existence rather late in the book, and in some sense it gives us a feeling of being extraneous. In the first two-thirds of the book there is no plot at all, really, as you say.

*Bryson*: That's right!

*Cohen*: There is just a succession of incidents in which one character comes to the fore, then another character is brought forward, and we learn to know them in that way.

*Bryson*: Fortunately for us they begin with the childhood. The childhood of Tom and Maggie is part of the unforgettable fascination of the book, isn't it?

*Evelyn*: I believe so, but I also believe, Mr. Bryson, that while the first two-thirds of the book, as Mr. Cohen says, may be the most powerful from his standpoint, I really believe that the book does not fall to pieces, as it were, in the last third. I feel that George Eliot places the characters in a position which she knows well and writes Maggie from a woman's standpoint with such power that she is able to make us believe that that is the way that those characters would behave under those circumstances, and we are interested.

*Bryson*: Yet, Miss Evelyn, Maggie, after all, does nothing particularly wrong. In a sense she draws back from something wrong. She goes on this quite innocent journey with Steven Guest, who is not really engaged to her friend Lucy, but with whom there's some kind of an understanding. She decides that it would be unfair to him and to Lucy for them to marry, which Steven wants to do, and then she tries to restore the whole *status quo*, doesn't she?

*Evelyn*: Yes, only that is where I find myself at variance with a great many of the people who talk about the book. I find it very difficult to believe that Maggie was right in foregoing this great love of her life with Steven Guest.

*Bryson*: She should have married him?

*Evelyn*: I don't know that she should have married him, but I don't see that the arguments are very valid which she gives to Steven. I feel that the damage had been done. Having once fallen in love, which was hardly a thing she could have steered away from or pull back from, although she did try and he did try, I cannot see that she was any more right to give up Steven Guest than to give up Lucy or Philip.

*Cohen*: It seems it might be useful if we could present for a moment exactly what the situation is in which Maggie finds herself. She first meets Philip when he is the schoolmate of her brother Tom and falls under his influence because he offers what Tom, despite all of her love for him, does not.

*Bryson*: Tom, her brother?

*Cohen*: Tom, her brother. All of his attraction does not offer stimulation of her mind. Philip offers that, and she falls completely under its spell. In the train of that affection for Philip comes also a deeper affection which, in the end, turns into a sort of half promise to marry him. Of course, she can't marry him because his father is her father's deadly enemy. Later on, when she is a grown lady and

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visits her cousin Lucy, she becomes acquainted with Steven Guest, who is Lucy's suitor, and immediately there is engendered between them a strange sort of electrical feeling which turns into passion, under the influence of which Maggie and Steven elope—do they elope really?

*Bryson*: Well, they go on a little journey together, Mr. Cohen, and Steven wants her to marry him.

*Cohen*: Maggie, of course, goes on the journey without any idea that it is going to turn into an elopement.

*Bryson*: Well, nothing wrong happened on the journey.

*Evelyn*: Actually, she's swept along into the journey on this wave of tremendous passion which George Eliot is able to instill into the pages of the book.

*Cohen*: Well, there's a point there. She goes out simply on an innocent boating excursion. The boat is benighted and storms come up, or something of the sort, and they can't get back the day on which they left. In fact, they don't get back for two days or something of that sort.

*Evelyn*: Before that, when she was starting out on the trip, had she been able to think at that time the way she thought the next morning she would never have started out on the trip. You recall that they went beyond the place at which they were supposed to get out. There was no storm at that point.

*Bryson*: Steven wanted it to be an elopement, didn't he, Miss Evelyn?

*Evelyn*: He wanted it to be an elopement. I don't believe he set out for it to be an elopement, but he was also swept along. The river seems to symbolize the passion that they felt for one another. Theirs was a passionate, really passionate love affair, not physically passionate but mentally and intellectually.

*Cohen*: I should disagree with you, Miss Evelyn. I think the entire interest of the affair between her and Steven is that it is entirely a physical affair.

*Evelyn*: I can't believe that because, if it were entirely physical, I believe that Maggie, with her great intellectual mind, would have been able to see through it. I think it was more than that.

*Bryson*: Well, it was physical in the way that her attraction to Philip was not.

*Cohen*: Yes! You think that Maggie should have been able to see through it, and that's precisely the point. She did not.

*Evelyn*: I think she *would* have been able to see through it had it only been a physical attraction, but I think there were many other things about Steven. Steven represented not only a physical attraction, but he represented that wonderful and amazing thing that women all over the world look for—someone very strong to lean on even though they have incredible strength of character themselves. They still look in the male for that wonderful sense of power, of being able to relax and really lean, not only physically but spiritually.

*Cohen*: Yes, but, Miss Evelyn, he offered merely another form of strength. He offered the most obvious form of strength, the arm

that was patently strong, strong enough to support her. Philip offered a real strength, and the fact is that Maggie doesn't seem to realize that. Maggie allows herself to be drawn into the affair with nothing to draw her on really except Steven's appearance and his charm of manner and his conversation.

*Evelyn:* I can't agree with you there, Mr. Cohen. If Maggie bears any relation, which some people seem to feel, to any of the feelings that George Eliot had—there is that wonderful statement which is always given about her—she, more than almost anyone, needed someone to be all in all to her, to whom she could be all in all. That, it seems to me, is what Maggie envisages in Steven. There is nothing in the book to say that Steven was a complete nincompoop, that he had no intellectual attainments whatsoever. Had Maggie and Steven possibly been allowed a life together, there is no reason to believe that they might not have had quiet evenings by the fireside reading books together. But that is never brought up, because he represents the tremendous pull that she had and which she had needed from the time she was a little child, and which she tried to find in Tom, her brother.

*Bryson:* Yes, we're leaving Tom out of this, Miss Evelyn. After all, Tom is one of the most important characters here. Tom is the self-righteous, condescending, generous brother who's completely incapable of understanding Maggie, who would not give Maggie willingly either to Philip, who represents the great spirit and the great mind in a shrunken body, or to Steven, who is more glamorous, to use a modern and somewhat vulgar word, and would be more man. He wouldn't give Maggie up to either one of them.

*Evelyn:* That's right, Mr. Bryson, and Maggie doesn't see any of those things as the child in him. All she sees in this older brother is a person whom she wants to tag after and be a part of. In other words, in Tom she has this person that she leans on and strives to be with and wants to be all in all to.

*Bryson:* I think, Miss Evelyn, part of the unforgettability and, to me, the heartbreak in the book, comes long before she gets into trouble with these two men, these two poles of attraction between which she can't decide. It's this impulsive, capricious, brilliant, marvelous, little girl being bullied by her self-righteous brother that is far more deeply moving tragically to me than what happens to her later.

*Cohen:* Not being bullied really, but simply taking her natural part in a relationship between a younger sister and a brother.

*Bryson:* But he is so self-righteous and so unmoved!

*Cohen:* But when does he really display these qualities of self-righteousness, unyieldingness, in a way that makes him objectionable?

*Bryson:* Almost from the beginning, to me.

*Cohen:* I think not as a child. I think those qualities in a child are perhaps not commendable, but at least they are understandable.

*Evelyn:* But aren't you forgetting, Mr. Cohen, the scene of the jam pots?

*Cohen:* No, I'm not forgetting the scene at all! I think it's one of the unforgettable scenes.

*Bryson:* Well, I would disagree with you, Mr. Cohen, there. I

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think Tom is an unfriendly and a morally unacceptable character all the way through. He's too much like his father without any saving virtue.

*Evelyn:* Ah, Mr. Bryson, are you not getting at something—that Tom is like that because of the father?

*Bryson:* Yes, of course!

*Evelyn:* And, therefore, he's still believable.

*Bryson:* Oh, he's very believable! I know lots of people like Tom. I wish I knew more like Maggie! The reason I don't like the people like Tom is because they don't appreciate the few Maggies that happen to come along. What about the other characters? There's a whole pageant of characters.

*Cohen:* Well, I do want to say, Mr. Bryson, that I think it's Tom's later appearance, and the appearance of all the characters in the last part of the book, which throws some unkind light on the portrait that's been drawn of them before. I think George Eliot's fumbling throughout the last part of the book involved the characters also, and somewhat undermined the work she'd achieved. The only characters who are not lost in that later part are the wonderful aunts and uncles and other rustics who are developed from the beginning to the end.

*Bryson:* Yet, those people who are almost Dickensian in the beginning take on more sympathy and more depth, more third dimension as time goes on.

*Cohen:* I think they're more than Dickensian. I should say they are Shakespearean. Your first comparison was the apter one.

*Bryson:* They're quite wonderful. But what's the moral issue here? With this set of tremendously impressive characters, impressive in their moral reality, what's the moral issue she's after? What's she trying to say? She says an impulsive girl gets herself into trouble. It's more than that.

*Evelyn:* I don't think she's trying necessarily to point a moral.

*Bryson:* Not in a crude way, but she's deeply moralistic in her attitude.

*Evelyn:* Yes, and, therefore, a moral can be drawn by almost anybody who reads the book through the characters—not actually through George Eliot's pontificating, although, goodness knows, she does quite a bit of that.

*Cohen:* And yet there is a moral that she lays down explicitly. She expects us to accept her reading of the moral that a person may not take his happiness at the expense of anyone else's discomfort, let alone unhappiness.

*Evelyn:* Of course, yes!

*Bryson:* And, of course, she's not shallow in that. She goes on, I think, to say by implication, that there are many lives to which happiness must be denied, because the only way you can get happiness after such a complication is at the expense of somebody else.

*Cohen:* Yes, and, of course, that's questionable.

*Bryson:* You mean, as a reading of life it's questionable?

*Cohen:* It's questionable as a reading of life and George Eliot's



tact, I think, in emphasizing the point, in overweighting the book with it, is questionable also. It seems to me that she doesn't realize, as her contemporaries did—certainly, as we do now—where the field of her true genius lay. It was the depiction of these village types of natural, simple, homely people, the description of their humors, their ways of thought and speech and action, which she should have contented herself with.

*Evelyn*: But don't you think, Mr. Bryson, that it was also an extraordinary thing for George Eliot to have written something which purports to be, for mid-Victorianism, a great moral book, when she, according to those same lights, lived herself what might be called an amoral life?

*Bryson*: Wasn't that one of the reasons for the book, Miss Evelyn? She was trying to show her conviction about her own marital relations, which she thought of as moral, but which were certainly legally irregular. She was trying to assert her own morality.

*Evelyn*: I often wonder.

*Bryson*: Was she trying to put herself on the side of the respectable people after all?

*Evelyn*: That seems to be the question. She herself very definitely lived her life as she thought she must, and she still had great understanding of people who did not agree with her. In other words, she could understand quite readily people not agreeing with her about her own mode of living, and yet she still had to pursue that because that was right to her.

*Bryson*: Yes, in her mode of living she was a quite un-Victorian person. All she did was to live with a man to whom she couldn't be legally married, although in every other sense she felt herself married, and always talked of herself as being married.

*Evelyn*: But she didn't take offense when other people didn't feel about it as she did.

*Bryson*: She understood them. You're right!

*Cohen*: I think perhaps she was trying to save people from a misreading of her action. She was trying to make them see, I think, that, had her irregular connection with Lewis involved some unhappiness to anyone else, she might not have entered on it. Mere irregularity, she thought, was not the charge that should be brought against her, and not the charge on which she should be judged, but this: had she or had she not caused unhappiness to Lewis' wife. And of course, she had not. She is saying, in the case of Maggie, that the irregularity of her possible union with Steven is no index of its permissibility. Whether it's permissible or not must be judged on the ground of whether it is causing pain to anybody or not. Legality is not the sanction of any relationship.

*Evelyn*: Exactly! But, Mr. Cohen, do you think that possibly that is one reason why Maggie's arguments to Steven are not quite valid? I don't really feel that they are.

*Bryson*: Well, it indicates, at least, that these people are real people even today.

# SHAW

## Saint Joan

JOHN MASON BROWN • MARGARET WEBSTER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I suppose there must be some reason—I am not quite sure what it is—that most of the books written about Joan of Arc have been written by men who, otherwise, were satirists, humorists, or mockers. Something about this woman seems to have appealed to men who otherwise were not too respectful toward the human race. Even Shaw had to come around to writing a *Saint Joan*, which is completely out of line with most of his plays. I wonder why.

*Brown:* I remember a story which may point to the answer to your question, Mr. Bryson. In Mr. Shaw's case, he was led into writing it by his wife.

*Bryson:* Pushed, perhaps.

*Brown:* Well, he was like most husbands who are led without realizing that they're being led by their wives. She is reported to have become interested in Joan herself and to have left innumerable books around the house, in tantalizing and conspicuous places. He fell for the bait, picked up the books and, finally, became passionately interested in Joan himself. And I think—if I may disagree with you—Joan is one of the most inevitable of Shaw heroines.

*Bryson:* She turned out to be, I'll agree, Mr. Brown. Nothing seems to fit Shaw better. But, on the face of it, and in the beginning, you would not have thought so, would you?

*Brown:* Well, I would have trembled, and I did tremble when he was writing it, but that was only because I had a relapse and forgot the glory of the statement of faith in that enchanting religious play for young people and old, *Androcles and the Lion*.

*Webster:* That play is, indeed, the closest forerunner to *Saint Joan* that Shaw ever wrote, especially in that wonderful speech of Lavinia's to the captain, when she describes how she cannot lay the pinch of incense on the altar. His statement of faith in *Androcles*, and particularly through Lavinia, seems to me a closer signpost to *Saint Joan* than anything else he ever wrote.

*Brown*: It seems to me, too, Miss Webster, that underneath all the wit, underneath the fooling and the reputation for buffoonery, there was always in Shaw this extraordinary mystical quality that ultimately found rational statement in the person of Joan. I think it was in order to rationalize mysticism that he really wrote the play.

*Bryson*: Yes. I didn't mean to question the fact that this is possibly Shaw's greatest play, and quite probably the greatest play of our time. But Shaw had a new Joan. Wasn't it also quite typical of Shaw that, in getting his Joan of Arc, his saint, his rebel, his heretic, he should have got it largely by denying the validity of all the other Joans that anybody had ever made. He didn't like Voltaire's; he didn't like Mark Twain's; he didn't like Anatole France's. He had to have his own Joan.

*Webster*: He didn't like the Victorian picture postcards of that little orphan of the storm, with her eyes cast skyward in a beam of light.

*Brown*: He also objected strenuously and rightly to the shameless scurrility of the part of Joan in *Henry VI*, upon which Shakespeare is *supposed* to have worked as a collaborator.

*Bryson*: Well, all those Joans are different from his, primarily in the fact that he has a peasant girl of genius. Isn't that right?

*Webster*: No, I think there are other differences—and I believe Miss Webster would agree. I think Shaw was fascinated by, among other things, what he described as "the variability of history." He was trying to point out that Joan was finally vilified, in the Shakespearean play, because he was too close to the times; the national feeling was too strong. He was saying that years have to pass before you have truth. And he was also saying that Edith Cavell and Sir Roger Casement, in his own time, would have gotten no fairer treatment by a contemporary playwright in wartime than Joan got at the hands of Shakespeare.

*Webster*: Not as fair, in fact, he claims, and probably rightly claims. Perhaps that is because he is preoccupied, to a greater extent than any of his predecessors, with the problem of the saint in society. One mustn't forget that Joan was only canonized in 1920, and that this play was completed three years later. This is actually, as far as I know, the first play or book about *Saint Joan*. The others were *The Maid of Orleans*, *Joan of Arc*, *The Heroine of France* and so on. I think this play, both the preface and the play itself, deals very strongly with what happens to society when a saint comes into its midst. Wouldn't you agree, Mr. Brown?

*Brown*: I do. And I think, Miss Webster, that Mr. Shaw was concerned with one other thing—with many other things, but one in particular. With that kind of flaming fairness of Shaw's spirit, I think he was truly upset by the way in which the romanticists had written about Joan. Whether they were Catholic or Protestants—the Protestants particularly—the tendency had been to blame the Church. Shaw was trying to say that you must know the background of the Middle Ages before you could judge the Church, that the trial, the first trial, was as conscientious a trial as could have been given, and

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that it really pained Cauchon to have Joan say what she finally said and do what she finally did.

*Bryson:* I'm sure that's true, Mr. Brown. What I was getting at, rather, was: what is Shaw's idea of a saint? It certainly isn't the Victorian idea, as Miss Webster says, of the little girl with her eyes ever upturned to heaven and her hands clasped. It has a very four-square, humorous, peasant-like quality—not commonplace, but not deified either.

*Webster:* I agree. It seems to me that Shaw feels there is nothing incompatible between faith and common sense—and Joan has a larger share of common sense than her predecessors in fiction.

*Brown:* I think, Miss Webster, his view of a saint is Shavian to this extent, that he insists not merely upon the peasant. Joan just happens to be the peasant expression of sainthood. His real insistence is that a saint is a genius. There is a special genius for saints which Joan has; in this case, out of ignorance. She's a woman who not only hears her voices but sees what is the difference between Christ and Christianity.

*Bryson:* Isn't it also Shavian, Mr. Brown, that to him genius and common sense, as Miss Webster says, are about the same thing. He insists that this is common sense, that Joan is the one who saw things as they were, and the others were the ones who had the blinders, and the good or bad inspirations. She saw things as they actually were. Isn't that right?

*Brown:* Shaw says in his magnificent preface, "A genius is a person who, seeing farther and probing deeper than other people, has a different set of ethical valuations from theirs, and has energy enough to give extra effort to this extra vision and its evaluations. A saint is one who, having practiced heroic virtues . . . puts them again into practice."

*Bryson:* And yet what he does here with his play is to say that, in a sense, the people who condemned Joan—the English who condemned her because she was stirring up nationalism, and the Church who condemned her because she was going against the authority of the Church—did so, as the play says quite specifically, because she was both a nationalist and a Protestant, and that this is the way a saint always would be.

*Webster:* Well, I think Shaw defines it very closely through the lips, not of Joan herself, but of one of the other characters who says that her real protest is the protest of the individual soul against the intervention of anyone, be it priest or peer, between the private man and his God. And the theme which seems to me to gather force cumulatively through the play, and which possibly may have surprised Shaw himself, is the influence of God, the feeling of God, that grows consistently and gathers power independent of the fine rationalizations and explanations which Shaw makes.

*Brown:* It seems to me, Mr. Bryson, to be not only the best play written in our times, but one of the great plays of all times. It is one of the most satisfying statements of faith and the need for it that I know of. Shaw states his real problem in the last line of the play, that great

line that is the summary, at the end of the epilogue: "Oh, God, that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, oh, Lord, how long?" And before that, Cauchon says the same thing again, when he says: "Must then a Christ perish in torment, in every age, to save those who have no imagination?" And he is speaking of the principle of the goodness of the voice of God spoken through this peasant girl.

*Bryson*: Yes, and isn't it important to note that Cauchon is, after all, the archbishop who condemned Joan, and who has come back now, in this later time, when Joan has become a saintly ghost, to admit that, although he had to do it—and Shaw says he had to do it, and the Church had to do it—they would always have to put down a saint, or they would have to be saints themselves. Isn't that the problem that Shaw presents?

*Webster*: I think he presents, too, the problem created by anybody who puts his own direct communication with God ahead of any of the dictates of organized society, whether it be the feudal society of the nobility or the organization of the Church. Such a person is a rebel and to some extent an anarchist, and those who support organized society cannot tolerate anarchy even if it is sainthood.

*Brown*: I agree with you. It is un-endurability of what is really the highest Christian virtue. That is what he's writing about. And I think the important thing is the preface, where you get that extraordinary lunge and range of Shaw when he starts with Socrates and draws the thing that was un-endurable there in an older man and a wise man. Here was an ignorant girl. Then he springs forward to Edith Cavell (and to Sir Roger Casement, in lesser terms). Then he gets us suddenly back, and likening Joan, because of her fondness for dressing as a boy, to Queen Christina. He gets her from every point of view. And then he describes thrillingly the background of the Middle Ages and is so fair to the Church, and gives you the feudal background—a picture of the religious and the warring elements, the priestly and the military classes.

*Bryson*: Isn't he, Mr. Brown, the first person to write about Joan who said that the Church, in trying to defend itself, could have done no other with any saint?

*Brown*: He did, indeed, say that. He took great exception, of course, to Mark Twain and to Andrew Lang, his immediate predecessors, and to Anatole France. He said Mark Twain was somebody who approached sainthood with the same kind of professional ignorance, with which, in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, he approached medieval England.

*Bryson*: How does he get this across? Here's a concept, typically Shavian, profound and disturbing. It says that sainthood is always intolerable to the people who are trying to keep society as it is and always will be, and that that's what was the trouble with Joan—not that these people were villains, but that she was a saint. That's quite a different way of stating the problem. How did he get it over? The play is episodic. Yet it is very moving in parts, and it has a way of hanging together. Now, what's the secret of that hanging together?

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*Brown:* Mr. Bryson, you used the word "episodic" just when I wanted to hear Miss Webster, and I have to break in at this point. One of the reasons this is perhaps the most satisfying of all Shaw's plays is not only because of the greatness of the theme or the glory of the language or the heat of the ecstasy, but because of the mysticism of the devotion that is in it. For once Shaw managed to find a major character who so concerned him that the Shavian drama was given a sure rudder to port. He also turned to an episodic form so that he might not have to write it as an extravaganza nor follow what he thought were the footsteps of Chekov or Ibsen—footsteps that he never could follow. In other words, he wrote these vignettes, these scene-by-scene things, which order their own construction and solve the problem of being detained too long.

*Webster:* I agree with you, Mr. Brown. I would even go further. I think he found, possibly for the first time, a character greater than he was himself. And this character, Joan, not only gave his play its cohesion and its cumulative force, but inspired him even beyond the play which he had set out to write. His extraordinary genius as a playwright, I also agree with you, is nowhere demonstrated more clearly than it is in this play, and, among other things, by the seven superb curtains which bring down every one of those seven scenes. Is there any playwright who can bring down a curtain like Shaw can?

*Brown:* And without any of the cheapness of, say, the Pinero curtain, with what's called the "carry-over line." This isn't that at all. This is just a kind of warming up of the interest. This is lifting the elevation. In the curtain lines, what is interesting is not that they lead to melodrama, or the trick thing, but that they somehow raise the level of each scene. You get a sense of taking a zigzag path, almost a ride, up to the next station on the mountain.

*Bryson:* This is true even to the epilogue?

*Webster:* Oh, indeed! The epilogue seems to me the summit of the mountain to such an extent that I can scarcely understand the controversy which raged when the play was first produced. There were critics who said that it should have finished at the end of the trial scene, and Shaw said that in that case it would have been merely the story of a girl who was burned. The reason he writes the play is crystallized in the epilogue, which I not only agree with, but think the epilogue the most moving scene in the play. It embodies some of the most beautiful dramatic prose ever written in English.

*Brown:* Well, I think Mr. Shaw, who had been a critic and knew the critical limitations, realized that the critics failed; they failed signally, I think, in appreciating the epilogue, because they had a feeling that a tragedy must end only with the self-realization in death. But Shaw knew that her tragedy was more than her death. It was the whole implication of history, and the epilogue is really the summary, the summation, the resumé, of what is the whole impact of Joan through the ages and her spiritual significance forever.

*Bryson:* Going back to the point you made earlier, Mr. Brown, that what struck Shaw here, aside from his interest in the character, was the slowness of history in finding out what the character of a

saint is, and that no saint can be appreciated by the people who are her contemporaries or his contemporaries—it took four hundred years for people to see that both parties to this struggle were right, in a sense; and that's why it's tragic.

*Webster:* But Shaw says more than that. He says that it isn't only the Middle Ages and her contemporaries that were to blame, but that, if she were to come to life again, we should burn her all over again.

*Brown:* It would be the same thing. I think one other thing should be added—and this is part of that fairness of which I spoke. Shaw's anger is partially a fuel in this play; it is the impact out of which comes his writing and his realization that we think we live in an age without superstition. Our surrender to the new dogma—to the belief that democracies are the perfect government, that perfection had been reached—was the very thing that drove him to defend the miraculous in the medieval period.

*Bryson:* Well, he goes further than defending the miraculous in a sense. Historically, he defends the Catholic Church. In many cases—I should think in the case of Voltaire, certainly, and perhaps in Anatole France and Mark Twain—the story of Saint Joan is a kind of club with which to beat the medieval Catholic Church, and Shaw defends it. Shaw tries to explain that the Church could have done no other. I'm not sure that's always been understood, even in modern times, has it?

*Webster:* No, I think it hasn't always been understood, Mr. Bryson, and I agree with you. I think he shows a great and salutary clarity of vision about the action of the Church. Indeed, I think, all through the play Shaw's compassionate understanding for humanity is more in evidence than it is in a great number of his plays.

*Bryson:* He wasn't quite so anxious to make humanity ridiculous in its superstitions; he made them tragic in their superstitions—which is a different thing. He could do either one with superb skill. Here he chose to do the second.

*Brown:* Certainly, the play not only deals with the saint; it reveals certain of the—if I may so—saintly qualities of Shaw himself.

*Webster:* Yes, I agree.

*Brown:* Shaw did have a bigness beyond the comprehension of most people, and that is one reason he so irritated millions. He himself presented to his own age something of a dilemma—in a lesser and certainly less spiritual vein than Joan did. That's why I think he understands her. But what brings him to her, heart-to-heart, is that some good in him knows what was eternal good in her.

*Bryson:* That didn't save men who might have been lesser men than Shaw from being a little ridiculous about Joan, Mr. Brown. How does it happen that Twain and Lang and Anatole France and those men couldn't see in Joan what Shaw saw? Is it a difference in time? Is it because we have to come to a time when a great tragic satirist like Shaw—that's the only way I know how to describe him—could live and could say what he pleased? It took a long life to get him to a place where he could say what he pleased.

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*Brown:* Well, it took a long life, and it took a willingness to comprehend, and a kind of freedom from prejudice. In the case of Twain it was a Protestant approach to what seemed to him a Catholic problem and a Catholic error. Shaw never does it on that basis. He merely tries to get in front of the facts and then go beyond the facts. The whole glory of the play is that he recognizes the facts, whether they're medical or material. And that's where Joan comes into the picture.

*Webster:* Yes, I think Shaw's capacity for understanding is what enabled him to write this play. One thing which he had, which is less generally stressed than his capacity for satire and for comedy, is his passionate faith in humanity's ultimate march towards God; and, whether that march is along Joan's path or along different paths, he understood it and saw the path ahead. That, I think, gives him a comradeship with Joan which is not shared by her more skeptical biographers.

*Bryson:* I think he feels the comradeship, doesn't he? When he makes Joan's sainthood a kind of genius of common sense, don't you think that Shaw felt that he had the same kind of genius? I don't say that satirically. I'm sure he did. I think he had a right to.

*Brown:* Well, beyond his feeling—because so many people feel but can't write—is the simple fact that Mr. Shaw could write as well as feel and think as well as write and feel. Don't you think that this play, which has such supreme simplicities itself in its episodic form, has one of the really touching scenes in the modern theatre—that one with the changes of the wind on the Loire, the proof that Joan was right—a physical device for proving what was the interior strength of Joan.

*Bryson:* A flag starts flying the other way on the stage. Now, that, I suppose—I bow to both of you—is great dramatic craft.

*Webster:* It is the selection of, as Mr. Brown says, the very simple but immensely significant thing. The fact that he gives it visual form on the stage where an audience is sitting in the auditorium, watching, gives it an impact which is very much of the theatre, which shows Shaw's craftsmanship of selection.

*Brown:* He does succeed, Mr. Bryson, in making us know the sainthood of Joan without ever painting her as being sanctimonious.

*Bryson:* Oh, she's never sanctimonious. And the devices he uses are often quite, one might say, ridiculous. The hens start to lay, for instance, in the first scene, after they've been bewitched, and everybody knows that a strange creature has been there. They stopped laying because she was being thwarted, and they started laying again when she was no longer thwarted. Now, that is so beautifully medieval, of course, that it strikes us as a bit comic, but it's perfect for its purpose.

*Webster:* That's a fairy story or a parable that appeals to the modern mind just as much as it did to the medieval mind, I think.

*Bryson:* You think it does appeal to the modern mind? It doesn't seem a bit ridiculous?



*Webster*: No, I believe the very simplicity of Joan is carried out in the simplicity of those symbols.

*Bryson*: But there's no substitute for Shaw himself, Miss Webster. What's the best scene in the book?

*Webster*: Oh, I would find that very hard to choose. I think that his writing of Joan, which is superb all the way through and increasingly so, is perhaps best exemplified, or at least best known, in Joan's speech at the end of the trial scene, after she has recanted. If you remember, she has recanted, and the inquisitor pronounces upon her her freedom from the sentence of death, but he says: "We do condemn thee to eat the bread of sorrow and drink the water of affliction to the end of thy earthly days in perpetual imprisonment." And she says: "Am I not then to be set free?" And she looks at them for a moment, and then she seizes the paper with the recantation and says: "Give me that writing," and she tears it. "Light your fire: do you think I dread it as much as the life of a rat in a hole? My voices were right. Yes: they told me you were fools, and that I was not to listen to your fine words nor trust to your charity. You promised me my life; but you lied. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread and water I fear: I can live on bread: when have I asked for more? It is no hardship to drink water if the water be clean. Bread has no sorrow for me, and water no affliction. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep from me everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me to hate Him: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible that was heated seven times. I could do without my war horse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed, blessed church bells that send my angel voices to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your counsel is of the devil and that mine is of God."

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# HARDY

## *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

JAMES FEIBLEMAN • ALICE LEONE MOATS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* As is the case with so many of the books which are candidates for immortality, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* shocked our grandfathers and grandmothers, the late Victorians, rather profoundly. I'm not sure that Hardy meant to shock them. I should say that Hardy was actually a very simple person. He thought he was saying something that everybody felt and that ought to be said.

*Moats:* Well, I think partly they were supposed to be shocked because of the girl being seduced in it and having an illegitimate child. But what really shocked them was the sexiness of that book. You smell sex in it. And this is true despite the fact that, compared to the modern novels that go into such physiological details, there is no scene that you could in any way raise an eyebrow over.

*Bryson:* There isn't actually, Miss Moats, a scene of passion in the book, is there?

*Moats:* No! I think the hero kisses Tess once on the cheek. The only way I can describe it is that it smells of sex and I think that really shocked them.

*Feibleman:* Well, the subtitle has something to say about that. The subtitle points out that this is a pure woman; and to say that Tess was a pure woman, as Hardy said it, I think, was a shocking thing.

*Bryson:* What Hardy was trying to do, I suppose, Mr. Feibleman, was to assure people that this was part of his attitude toward life, his philosophy. Somehow or other, this girl was betrayed by life. She was also betrayed by men; but she was betrayed by life, essentially. She didn't have a chance to express herself. After all, she was pushed into a pretense. I mean, Derbyfield was supposed to be a corrupted form of D'Urbervilles. She represented a kind of decayed snobbishness. She was only a milkmaid, but she was a relic of a faded, lost aristocracy. She falls into the hands of a man who, perhaps ille-

gitimately, is carrying this famous name of D'Urbervilles and he takes full advantage, not exactly of her innocence, but of her responsiveness.

*Feibleman*: Well, aren't you falling into the modern error, Mr. Bryson, of talking about these people as though they were contemporary people?

*Bryson*: Is that an error, Mr. Feibleman?

*Feibleman*: I think it's an error in this case, because I think more highly of Hardy than that. I think Hardy was a mythologist in the good sense of the word.

*Bryson*: You see, Mr. Feibleman, I'm not an absolute, out-and-out, irredeemable, and irreconcilable anti-modernist the way you are.

*Feibleman*: Well, my anti-modernism has exceptions, but very few. That only means that I'm interested in quality standards. David Cecil, one of Hardy's better critics, I think, pointed out that Hardy was writing about a folk myth, really. He was writing about the English folk myth. His plots are the plots of old folk songs—particularly this one. Remember, he says that this is an innocent maiden betrayed by a seducer, and then ending her life on the gallows. Now, this is an old folk myth.

*Bryson*: Like an old ballad!

*Feibleman*: Like an old English ballad! His characters, his plots, are out of old English ballads.

*Bryson*: Yes, but he takes those characters, Mr. Feibleman, as I'm sure even an anti-modernist like you would agree, and invests them with a profound moral significance. At least the people of his time, and perhaps people even today, find that. Tess is not just a simple girl. What kind of a girl is Tess, Miss Moats?

*Moats*: She's a girl of tremendous emotion and temperament. Her submissiveness is extraordinary to us in this day, but it's part of her character, and it's part of the thing that makes her so sexy. It makes her so attractive. I know several men to whom I've talked to lately about Tess, and each one of them said to me, "Oh, that was an attractive girl! That must have been a wonderful woman." That's the effect that came across to them—of real warmth and, perhaps not charm, I don't think you could say that, but of earthiness.

*Bryson*: And responsiveness.

*Moats*: And enormous responsiveness, of course.

*Bryson*: And she has the bad luck to fall first into the hands of an unscrupulous person who seduces her and abandons her and her child, and then to fall into the hands of a man who is a rigid moralist and can't understand that this could happen to her.

*Moats*: But, the point is that Alec D'Urbervilles does not abandon her. She walked out on him.

*Bryson*: Ah, yes, but he didn't want to marry her. He didn't want to make her a respectable woman in Victorian terms.

*Moats*: No, he didn't. But it showed up Tess' strength; she disliked him so much that she never forgave him. I wonder even if she would have married him.

*Feibleman*: I think the emphasis here is not on personality, but on character.

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*Bryson*: What's the difference, Mr. Feibleman?

*Feibleman*: Well, personality is a matter of individual peculiarities; character is a kind of strength in the face of events, a rigid immobility in terms of some moral criterion. I think this book is an essay on morality.

*Bryson*: I'm sure it is!

*Feibleman*: It is primarily an essay on morality. And by morality I don't mean what most people mean by the term. Disapproving of sex is what we usually mean by morality in the common sense today. I don't mean that. It's the moral issue that Hardy is concerned with; and the moral issue for him is how to fit morality of any sort, of the English sort in the nineteenth century, into the realities of a great natural world. That makes of Hardy's people what the Greeks call heroic size. Life-size-and-a-half is what these people are.

*Bryson*: Yes, but, now, Mr. Feibleman, what's the relation between these people, whom Hardy was trying to make real and give moral significance to, and this natural world in which they lived? Would you say they represented moral principles? Was the natural world friendly to their moral principles?

*Feibleman*: I don't mean they represented moral principles. I mean that the moral criterion by which they are judged—they and the events in which they are involved, sexual or whatever—that that morality has no place in the understanding of nature of Hardy's time.

*Bryson*: That is, Hardy thought that moral judgments were not the kind of judgments which nature itself made upon people?

*Feibleman*: Yes. Let me put it in more philosophic terms.

*Bryson*: Don't make it technical!

*Feibleman*: Well, since the seventeenth century, Locke's secondary qualities—human values in other words—had no place in nature.

*Bryson*: That's very technical! What do you mean?

*Feibleman*: Well, let's say that human values had had no place in the natural world since the seventeenth century. This idea, which was a technical idea, became rather generally accepted, people assumed, you see, that man and his values were alien to nature. I think that is an error which prevailed from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. We're getting over it, but it's what made Hardy misunderstand the Greeks.

*Bryson*: Well, forgetting the Greeks for a moment, is that what Hardy means when he says the president of the immortals had ended his sport with Tess?

*Feibleman*: No! I think what he meant by that was that fate, destiny, the gods, or god—whatever you will—had played with people through the idea of chance. Chance is the villain in this book, as it is in all of Hardy's works—chance or accidents.

*Bryson*: Yes, it was accident. Tess tried to tell Angel—what a horrible name!—the good man, that she'd had this adventure with D'Urbervilles, and the letter slipped under the rug, and he never got it. She tried to get away from Alec when he came back and took her in again as his mistress, and she couldn't make it. She finally thought

she solved everything by killing the man who had ruined her life, and yet there is accident, accident, accident all the way through.

*Moats*: It all started with an accident. Hardy started the very first page with old D'Urbervilles, the father, coming home and discovering that he is the last of this old line and letting it go to his head and then sending Tess to see her cousins. That was one accident. She never would have gone except for another accident, because, in spite of her submissiveness, the girl had a certain character. You remember that, when the father and mother wanted to send her to these rich cousins to see what they could do for her, she didn't want to go; and then she took the horse into market, and, when the horse was killed, she felt it was her fault, and that was why she finally agreed to go. So it was really two accidents that got her there in the first place.

*Feibleman*: I submit, Miss Moats, that what makes the people awkward and the events awkward in this book is the fact that nature isn't. I think the description of women harvesting and of that dairy and the life in the dairy are superb.

*Bryson*: That's where Hardy's at his best.

*Feibleman*: And it can't be overlooked. It's the character of the book.

*Moats*: Oh, yes, but nature always is a main character with him.

*Feibleman*: Yes!

*Moats*: That county that he invented in Wessex is always there. As a rule I really do not like nature descriptions very much, but I get quite carried away by these. When he describes the girl milking a cow, you know that Hardy once milked a cow.

*Feibleman*: I think we've forgotten too fast in the modern world, with its emphasis on psychoanalysis and social science, that man is part of nature. Even in a big center like New York City, you don't have to get very far away from it to find that you're in the woods. Even this city is in the woods, and there aren't many cities like this so far as size is concerned. We do live in a natural world. It's a mistake to forget it and that it concerns and governs not only events outside of man's life—but man's life after all.

*Bryson*: You know, Mr. Feibleman, I'm a little confused. Hardy was always insisting that man lived in nature, was affected by nature, and that his fate was determined by accidents in nature, with the gods pulling the strings behind the scenes, but that actually, as I understand your point, man's moral ideas had no home in nature.

*Feibleman*: That's right! Let me call your attention to one very amusing passage—I forget where it is. In one place Hardy says that Tess saw that theology and morality have a historical but not a moral association. Now, it's a very rare dairy maid, you know, who sees a thing like that! But my point really is that the Greeks were haunted, I think, by the notion of a natural society.

*Bryson*: Isn't it important to point out, Mr. Feibleman, before you make that point, that Hardy himself thought he was writing Greek tragedy and said so?

*Feibleman*: Yes, I think he did. That beautiful passage at the end, the last paragraph, in which Hardy talks about the president of

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the immortals having had his sport with Tess—the Greeks would never have written that line.

*Bryson*: And yet he thought he was being Greek.

*Feibleman*: He thought he was quoting Aeschylus, and, just as he made a mistake about the words, he also made a mistake about the idea. The Greeks were haunted with the notion that there is a natural society, if we can find it, and so they accepted nature and the world and events. It was a tragic view, but the Greek idea is an acceptance of tragedy. Hardy is furious at the fact that morality has no place in nature and that yet we are governed by it. So, as much as he loves nature and people, he can't get them together.

*Bryson*: He is indignant, perhaps, rather than furious.

*Feibleman*: Yes!

*Moats*: Very indignant! But I don't know that he really makes nature have much effect *on* these people. They live *in* it, they're part of it.

*Bryson*: Accident is part of nature here. It's the way the material universe is run which upsets and defeats and frustrates and finally destroys these people.

*Feibleman*: Not only that, but all his critics have pointed out that the closer people are to the natural world the more real they are in Hardy. His civilized city people talk as no city people ever talked; but his primitive characters are real. Somebody has pointed out that he was an architect, you know, and his country bumpkins are just as real as the gargoyles on cathedrals. He was a great admirer of Gothic architecture. And I submit that this is a Gothic work with comic gargoyles, but still very beautiful.

*Moats*: Well, he knew those people of the country because he lived among them, and that's why he writes about them. They were the people he was brought up among, and he always remained the simple man, although later on people tried to make him into the great literary figure.

*Bryson*: What machinery did he use here? We're talking now about his ideas, about the relation between man and nature, and the reality or viability of the moral world, and whether or not the gods make sport of men, ideas which began, I should think, with the Elizabethans, but went on through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and on into the nineteenth. How does he make these people real? What is the machinery of his writing? After all, this man is an artist.

*Feibleman*: Well, the machinery of his writing is to take a set of characters from a well-established folk song and put them in a conventional, melodramatic plot, and place them against a natural background where they fit but the plot doesn't. People are natural objects for Hardy, but the morality under which they operate and by which they are judged doesn't fit the natural world.

*Bryson*: Because, Mr. Feibleman, they're people and, therefore, have ideas of good and evil.

*Feibleman*: Yes, but what's wrong with good and evil being natural things?

*Bryson*: Well, he didn't think nature cared about it.

*Moats*: I don't think nature cares very much about good and evil, does it? Isn't that a human idea really?

*Feibleman*: No, it's a modern idea. The question is not whether nature cares about morality, but what morality fits nature, you see. The fact that we can go wrong here has deceived us into believing that there's no possible way in which we can go right. I don't know what the right morality is.

*Bryson*: Hardy felt that probably you couldn't go right, didn't he, Mr. Feibleman, and that in almost any case a simple, natural person was going to get into trouble, that life was tragic in that sense?

*Feibleman*: What happens to people who really live according to Hardy? They run into a kind of a cosmic joke in poor taste.

*Moats*: Well, yes! The ones who really live, of course, haven't a chance. That's the tragic thing. When I read *Tess* as a little girl, I remember that Tess didn't have a chance and I was awfully upset all the way through it because I knew she hadn't a prayer and that there was nothing that could save this poor girl.

*Bryson*: So you read it again?

*Moats*: I read it again . . . yes!

*Bryson*: And you saw this girl move from simplicity into trouble and finally into murder, as if murder would solve her problems, and the gods had their sport. Were you moved?

*Moats*: Very moved! Very moved!

*Bryson*: It still has its tragic power?

*Moats*: Oh, it still has enormous tragic power.

*Bryson*: Well, why? Is that because the people were real? After all, it's a very melodramatic plot. You almost smile sometimes at the turns in the plot.

*Moats*: Oh, but life is foolish and melodramatic!

*Bryson*: Of course it is!

*Feibleman*: Don't you think it's possible on that point to make a comparison between Hardy and Shelley? Genius of this sort is just over the border from foolishness, but the border is never crossed.

*Bryson*: It's doubtful whether foolishness ever comes into Hardy. Some very great critical writers—George Moore, for instance—have insisted that Hardy is often very foolish because of the almost naive unconsciousness and awkwardness of the texture of his writing. He's not a good writer in the ordinary sense at all.

*Feibleman*: Well, it depends on what you mean. He's a very good writer when he gets going.

*Bryson*: Yes!

*Moats*: When he writes about nature particularly.

*Bryson*: But he's often awkward. He's often self-conscious. He hasn't great craftsmanship.

*Feibleman*: I didn't say that Hardy was foolish. I said he's just over the border.

*Bryson*: Yes!

*Feibleman*: Just as Shelley is. You see, one more push and it would be nonsense; and, if you analyze it into its elements, as we're

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trying to do today, you get some kind of nonsense. Any skillful dramatist, any clever novelist, would do better than this, but he wouldn't achieve these heights. And I think Hardy is not the top; I don't think Hardy is any Dostoyevsky or Aeschylus or Shakespeare. But I think he's very great, indeed, and I think he has something that the modern world very much overlooks, and that's why I think he's so important to us—he has quality standards. This is a man that stands for quality.

*Moats*: Well, I think he has to be very close to genius in order to go that far. The trouble with most writers is that they know their limitations and don't dare go into melodrama, because it is dangerous.

*Bryson*: We could give him the title of genius, all right, without being overgenerous, Miss Moats. But we're talking about him as if he were a contemporary. In a sense he is, and yet nearly all of the things that make the great difference in this plot have much diminished in our modern consideration. Tess might have got into trouble in a modern world, but she'd have behaved very differently in a modern world. Are we still moved by the power of the man, or does the problem still move us? Is this still a real problem?

*Feibleman*: I think every great artist, Mr. Bryson, is concerned with the same problem that every great scientist is concerned with, and really every great theologian, and that is the question that Whitehead put most simply. He said, "What is it all about?" That's really the question, and I think Hardy is concerned with this question.

*Bryson*: He is, indeed!

*Feibleman*: I think he's concerned with the very greatest problem. Now, the fact that he isn't concerned with it in the very greatest way makes him slightly less than the greatest. He doesn't accept his own idea really. Hardy says in one place in this book, or one of his characters says, that there's one better thing than leading a good life and that's not leading any life at all. No Greek would have said this. The Greeks didn't believe that. Besides, all the machinery creaks in this book, all of it. Almost every image is a phony image. But still there's a quality that gets through everything, just as there is in everything great.

*Moats*: Well, there is a quality of emotion. I think he really believed in these people, and he is emotional about them, and he puts it across to you.

*Bryson*: Wouldn't you say, Miss Moats, that it's not only the emotion, but the profoundly moral and thoughtful character of the emotion that reaches you? It's something more than pathetic.

*Moats*: Oh, no, it's really tragic.

*Feibleman*: I think what it is is the Christian virtue, the worth of every human individual. Individual human dignity despite plot, despite character, despite everything, is what gets through this book, and I think that's something that the Greeks knew about. Plato knew about it, as you pointed out, Mr. Bryson, but I think he underemphasized it. I don't think it was made the thing that it has been made by the Christian tradition, and I think that's what is great about



the Christian tradition—the infinite worth of every human soul and every human individual.

*Moats*: Yes, in spite of her great submissiveness, once in a while Tess did rebel. When she walks out on Alec, when she kills Alec, she does show individual character. She can't just let chance take her over completely.

*Feibleman*: I'd like to quote the favorite saying of a noted French critic, to the effect that nothing is well known until it's been known a long time. I think to judge *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* today is to judge too hastily.

*Bryson*: Would you say it was still worth reading, Mr. Feibleman?

*Feibleman*: Very much so!

*Bryson*: Why would you tell a person to read it? Because it is a book in which a great problem is depicted in terms of profoundly moving tragic figures? Or would you say that they would just enjoy reading it?

*Feibleman*: No, I would say that they might have touched greatness if they had read it, and that they might be better people for having read it. I think the education of the spirit somehow is what comes from reading books of this level.

*Moats*: Well, there's another reason, you know—because it is good reading. You can't put it down. At least, I couldn't put it down once I got started with it. This is a very important consideration and critics are always overlooking it. It seems to me a very important thing that we should read for pleasure. I can't imagine reading anything, Mr. Bryson, that would give one greater pleasure than *Tess*.

*Bryson*: The reader does have the right to demand of an author that he be at least interested and carried along and involved—let's not use the word "entertainment." In other words, he has to be a craftsman, and you think Hardy was.

*Moats*: Definitely!

*Feibleman*: We have come to think of primitivism as irrational, and I'd like to point out that Hardy doesn't mean that. He says two things in this book. He says it would have been better if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilization, and he also says that he thinks "the impressionable peasant leads a fuller, more dramatic life than the pachydermatous king." Now, these two statements are not irreconcilable. There are two kinds of primitivism. There's an irrational primitivism, and a rational primitivism. I think Hardy was rational.

*Bryson*: He was profoundly rational, and I think you're right in saying that the artist in him, in spite of the awkwardness of the texture of his writing, in spite of the sometimes grotesque and Gothic quality of the plot, in spite of the fact that many of his characters are lay figures, deals superbly with the chief problem—the problem of a woman of great submissiveness and responsiveness who, through a series of accidents, gets into the hands of two men that destroy her, and whom she must destroy.

# STRACHEY

## Queen Victoria

PRINCESS KROPOTKIN • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In spite of the fact that there are a great many people today who can remember when Queen Victoria died just fifty years ago—this includes myself—her era and her life seem to be almost part of ancient history. The gap between us and Queen Victoria is almost as big as that between our day and the world of Solon and Socrates.

*Michalopoulos:* I wouldn't say that, Mr. Bryson, because I actually saw the dear old lady!

*Bryson:* And yet you're younger than I am!

*Michalopoulos:* Am I? Anyway, I saw her in 1900 driving down Park Lane; and the next year I actually saw her funeral. So, to me, the Victorian era is still very much alive. I consider myself to be a Victorian.

*Bryson:* But you do agree with me, don't you, Mr. Michalopoulos? The break between today and that day is about as complete as one can imagine.

*Michalopoulos:* Oh, yes, yes.

*Bryson:* And in a way Strachey's book has made that break more complete, because he has given a kind of classic form to this old lady's life.

*Kropotkin:* Very much of a classic form. I think that people are beginning to feel a great nostalgia for the Victorian era.

*Bryson:* You mean, Princess, we wish we could go back to crinolines and Prince Albert coats?

*Kropotkin:* Oh, not that! But the stability of the era is something that a great many people have begun to think about far more than they did in the interval.

*Michalopoulos:* I would agree entirely, Princess. I remember, when I was a boy and was studying Greek history, I asked my father once, "Do you think we shall ever be invaded again as we have been in the past?" And he said: "My boy, don't be silly. We are now in the twentieth century. Nobody invades other countries."

*Kropotkin*: What optimism! I can't claim to have seen Queen Victoria, but I did see quite a few people left over from Victorian days. As a small child, I met Charles Dickens' sister-in-law, Miss Hogarth, who is supposed to be the prototype of Agnes in *David Copperfield*, and she looked so like Victoria! I sat on a stool at her feet, and here was this large figure in voluminous skirts and a nice little lace bonnet with violet ribbons.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, in the early part of the century all the old ladies used to like to imitate Queen Victoria's dress and mannerisms.

*Kropotkin*: They all wore those funny little bonnets!

*Bryson*: And yet both of you, who grew up in England under the shadow of the Victorian era, will agree that there was a good deal more to it than crinoline and Victoria. Whether she was a great queen or not is, perhaps, worth debating. Certainly she was an extraordinary person. Strachey makes her out to be an extraordinary person.

*Michalopoulos*: She was an extraordinary person!

*Bryson*: Only by position, Mr. Michalopoulos?

*Michalopoulos*: No, by character. She had an extraordinary character. She began by being a thorough German, and, somehow or other, she ended an English woman. I don't quite know how.

*Kropotkin*: Oh, I debate that "English woman!"

*Bryson*: You think she never was an English woman?

*Kropotkin*: I think she is the most completely German person I have ever read about.

*Michalopoulos*: Except that the pride of her position, the pride of being queen of England, made her perhaps not an English woman, but an English institution.

*Kropotkin*: It made her an English queen, yes. The most remarkable thing to me about her character is a trait that has come down in the British Royal Family; she was absolutely honest, truthful. Strachey mentions that, and Lady Littleton mentions that.

*Bryson*: Are you suggesting those are German qualities and not British?

*Kropotkin*: No! No, those are universally good qualities, I think, but she had them. Not all German people are truthful, we know that, but she had that, and another quality she did have, which was very German, was that of tremendous diligence.

*Bryson*: Yes! She liked to work.

*Kropotkin*: And I think that, with a couple of exceptions, most members of her family are like that.

*Bryson*: We are always overlooking in this country, Princess, the fact that the British Royal Family is a German family, and that their great examples have been great in the German way. We forget this imposition of a German royalty upon the British people, because the British people themselves tend to forget it.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, they have forgotten it, because the interests of the British Royal Family are completely identified with the British people today.

*Kropotkin*: That's right!

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*Bryson:* You say she was diligent. She liked to work; she believed in doing her duty.

*Kropotkin:* She worked from morning to night.

*Bryson:* She worked at her job.

*Kropotkin:* She worked. Don't you remember when she and Albert had their two desks adjoining? He was always there first. He got up before seven.

*Michalopoulos:* He got up before the sun rose and worked with his little green lamp. And then she would get out of bed a little later and sit near him at the next desk and he would have a sheaf of documents. They'd work for hours! The minutest details of administration would be gone through by those two. It's really appalling.

*Kropotkin:* Well, look how diligently George VI has worked, up to his recent sickness, if not at Government, at any rate at his property.

*Bryson:* There's quite a difference, Princess.

*Kropotkin:* But he's not afraid of work.

*Bryson:* That's right. Well, however the present King, who's now in great danger, as we know, may work, these people worked at governing England.

*Kropotkin:* Oh, yes!

*Michalopoulos:* They worked down to the minutest details.

*Bryson:* And we're talking now about these two people as Strachey depicted them.

*Michalopoulos:* Yes! For instance, there was a question about whether the sailors in the British Navy should be allowed to wear beards or not.

*Kropotkin:* I noticed that.

*Michalopoulos:* And the Queen, says Strachey, wrote anxiously to the First Lord of the Admiralty. On the whole, Her Majesty was in favor of the change.

*Bryson:* Of having beards or no beards?

*Michalopoulos:* Having beards.

*Bryson:* They were allowed to grow beards?

*Michalopoulos:* They were allowed to grow beards, and this is what she says. This is her own writing—she writes in the third person—her own personal feeling would be for the beards without the moustaches, as the latter have rather a soldier-like appearance; but, then, the object in view would not be obtained, to prevent the necessity of shaving.

*Kropotkin:* Don't miss the bit where she says that the beards must be clean, because that's marvelous.

*Michalopoulos:* Yes, she says, therefore, it had better be as proposed, the entire beard, only to be kept short and very clean.

*Bryson:* Now you are making her, in Strachey's portrait, diligent, honest, dutiful, devoted to her brilliant husband (who was more German even than she), but a little ridiculous.

*Kropotkin:* No!

*Michalopoulos:* No, No! I am not trying to make her ridiculous. I am trying to say that she went right down to the root of every mat-

ter. She had not the slightest idea that this might be a little ridiculous or excessive. It was excessive. Nobody would expect the Queen to go down to the detail of an administration to the point of deciding whether sailors should have or not have beards. But she took it extremely seriously, because she took all her business seriously, down to the very minutest detail. She considered this only a detail, but a necessary detail which she had to decide upon.

*Bryson*: Well, what about her character—again as Strachey depicts it—in major decisions? Was Queen Victoria, as he pictures her, a great Queen in the sense of having a first-class mind that could grasp large policy?

*Kropotkin*: I don't think she had a first-class mind at all. I think she was also extremely difficult. You remember Disraeli's relationship with her? Disraeli said that everybody in the world loves flattery, but that with royalty you put it on with a trowel.

*Bryson*: He put it on with a shovel!

*Kropotkin*: He certainly did! He prompted her with the idea of being Empress of India, and she went crazy about it and would give nobody any peace until she was Empress of India. She had a terrific amount of conceit of position, if one can call it that. And there was another thing. She wanted the war with Russia. She was very, very difficult about that.

*Bryson*: The Crimean War?

*Kropotkin*: The Crimean War. She wanted that.

*Michalopoulos*: She tried to harry the Government into getting her into it.

*Kropotkin*: What was it she said in one place? Strachey quotes her. She threatened to abdicate if they didn't declare war, and she called the Russians "retarders of all liberty and civilization." Very apt for today, fifty years later.

*Bryson*: Well, she had her opinions about these great matters. But don't we need, in order to complete Strachey's picture of this woman, who, although not a great woman, dominated Europe and the world for more than half a century, to put her husband into the portrait?

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, definitely, you do. But I question something you said—"Not a great woman." I think she was a great woman in spite of the fact that she wasn't a clever woman.

*Bryson*: Not clever? Was she intelligent?

*Kropotkin*: No, I think she wasn't. I don't agree at all, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: She had a great deal of feminine instinct and a great deal of common sense and a great deal of German common sense, but she was not an intelligent woman. I would even go so far as to say that she was perhaps a stupid woman.

*Bryson*: Well, I'm an unreconstructed Democrat, Mr. Michalopoulos. I'd like to know what you think would have happened to this woman if she had been born in an American household without backing, without position, without money.

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*Kropotkin*: She would have run the business of the village she was in.

*Bryson*: She'd have been president of the women's club?

*Kropotkin*: Oh, surely!

*Michalopoulos*: She wouldn't have liked the women's club. But she would have run the town.

*Kropotkin*: She would have run the town without question. Oh, yes!

*Bryson*: Run it well?

*Kropotkin*: I think she would have run it very well.

*Michalopoulos*: If it were a small town, she would have married the mayor and run it the way she wanted it to be run.

*Bryson*: Now, there's this other dimension to this woman—her husband. It seems to me you're not fair to Strachey's remarkable book unless you bring in his extraordinarily penetrating and powerful picture of this rather unhappy man whom she married and who made her a great Queen.

*Kropotkin*: She made herself, or, rather, Stockmar made her—the famous Baron Christian Friedrich von Stockmar.

*Bryson*: The doctor behind the scenes.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, the grey eminence of two thrones.

*Kropotkin*: He made Leopold, Victoria's uncle, who became Leopold the First of Belgium, and he literally made Albert. But the thing that interests me psychologically is how wise he was because he saved the marriage. Albert was obviously unhappy. He didn't like England much; the English didn't like him. He wasn't getting on very well with Victoria, because he was only the Queen's husband. Stockmar trained him and got him to work so hard that eventually he became Prince Consort—that was as far as the title went—and really was King of England with Victoria for twenty years.

*Bryson*: But Stockmar had good raw material to work with.

*Kropotkin*: Oh, yes!

*Bryson*: Albert was a far more gifted, wise, and generously endowed person than Victoria.

*Kropotkin*: Oh, much more!

*Michalopoulos*: And he was extremely industrious.

*Kropotkin*: And he made Victoria take an interest in government, which she was not very much inclined to do.

*Bryson*: Well, I would like to ask another question here, Princess. This is the picture that Strachey draws of the—well, Mr. Michalopoulos says "stupid"—we will say "intuitively intelligent," immensely diligent, Queen.

*Michalopoulos*: Stupid but great!

*Bryson*: This is his picture of this stupid but great woman with her far more wise and far more gifted husband who, gradually, and in spite of his distaste for England, and England's dislike of him, became the power with Stockmar behind him. That's what Strachey says. Now, let's look at it as history. Is it what happened?

*Michalopoulos*: Do you know that, in answer to what you said,

it was Prince Albert who prevented England from declaring war on the North in the War between the States?

*Kropotkin*: Yes!

*Michalopoulos*: And on his deathbed the last thing he did—he liked writing these interminable memoranda and made memoranda of twenty pages on every question, memoranda all the time—when he was actually dying, he wrote a memorandum proving how disastrous it would be if Great Britain went to war with the northern states of North America.

*Bryson*: All right! But Queen Victoria was about forty-two then. She went on for almost half a century after that.

*Michalopoulos*: She went on for forty years.

*Bryson*: There were forty years of peace. They were a great period in the development of Europe. Albert wasn't there. Stockmar wasn't there. Stockmar had gone back to Europe, and Albert was dead.

*Kropotkin*: She depended on her own Prime Ministers.

*Michalopoulos*: Not entirely. The curious thing was that she depended on the inspiration of Albert. There was his desk next to hers; so she would take the papers, and, as well as she could, she would then write voluminous notes on everything that the Prime Ministers brought her. She would write in the margins. She felt she had to write something, so she would write something. It might be stupid; it might be good. But she would make forthright comments about everything.

*Kropotkin*: Do you remember what she wrote after Albert's death? I think it was in a letter to Queen Augusta, of Germany, that she wrote of him as "my very life and soul and conscience." She stresses a number of times after Albert's death that he was her "conscience." So she really went on, I think, in the way in which he had guided her; but she did make quite a few mistakes.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, yes, she did.

*Bryson*: But she was sustained by something else. Albert had never shaken in the slightest degree her idea that God had made her Queen of the British and Empress of India, and it was her business to see that she was a good one. There was never any doubt. It was the conscience of a queen.

*Kropotkin*: On the whole, too, she was terribly lucky in the men who surrounded her. Of course, she was awfully avaricious. Do you remember the row there was about the money that the family got? Not only did she have a tremendous amount of money—they say that she accumulated two million pounds by the time she died—but she inherited half a million English pounds from a man called Neald. Do you remember that?

*Michalopoulos*: Yes!

*Kropotkin*: He was an eccentric miser, and, when he died, he willed his property to Queen Victoria.

*Michalopoulos*: That's one of the advantages of being a queen. Nobody is going to will half a million dollars to me.

*Kropotkin*: There was a big fight, though, about the tremendous

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sums of money that the whole family got. She was forever saying, "Now, Arthur has come of age; he has to have thirty thousand pounds a year more and the Queen needs more." This was perpetually going on.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, she wanted money.

*Bryson*: Doesn't that bring up the whole question of whether monarchies are worth what they cost?

*Michalopoulos*: I don't think they cost so much now as they did.

*Bryson*: Well, they did!

*Kropotkin*: Oh, they do cost! I never thought I'd see the day that I thought maybe the money is well spent, but I don't believe it costs as much as graft in a country where there isn't a monarchy. It seems to me that if you happen to have a conscientious constitutional monarch, then whatever money the family gets is less than what is wasted in a country where there is a lot of graft.

*Michalopoulos*: I don't think that Victoria was always quite a constitutional monarch. She was a constitutional monarch when she had a Prime Minister whom she liked. When she had a Prime Minister whom she disliked, like Gladstone, she was different.

*Kropotkin*: As with Palmerston. Then she overstepped, and how!

*Michalopoulos*: But in the case of Gladstone, Gladstone had a majority of one hundred and fifteen in the House of Commons and because she didn't like certain things that he was threatening to do she tried to stop it.

*Bryson*: He didn't flatter her.

*Michalopoulos*: He didn't flatter her! This is what she wrote to him: "No one is more truly liberal in her heart than the Queen, and she has always strongly deprecated the great tendency of the present Government to encourage, instead of checking, the stream of destructive democracy which has become so alarming. . . . She will not be the sovereign of a democratic monarchy."

*Bryson*: Well, put after that statement all the exclamation points that she doubtless meant to imply, nevertheless, during that time Britain constructed her democracy and laid the foundations of her present labor revolution, in spite of Victoria. We think back upon that era as a time of great expansion of freedom, of great expansion of liberal politics.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, what characterized the reign of Queen Victoria was great stability, and, during that great stability and that time of imperial grandeur, there was also developed an idea to which she was totally alien because she didn't understand it—the theories of free trade.

*Kropotkin*: There were also forty years of peace, weren't there, between the Crimean War and the Boer War? And during all this time of peace there is one thing that I have always disliked in Victoria immensely, and I don't think Strachey brings it out very much, except in one place *en passant*, and that is that she never encouraged any of the great scientists, or the great writers, or any of the great



men of her day. Albert did, but Albert had an interest in labor conditions, which she didn't.

*Michalopoulos*: She didn't.

*Kropotkin*: No, not at all. There's no trace of any such interest—at any rate not in Strachey's book, and not in most of the other ones I've read.

*Michalopoulos*: No, no trace whatever!

*Kropotkin*: She never cared what the conditions of labor were for women, or how they worked in the mines, which were absolutely awful and inhuman. There's not a trace of such a sympathy.

*Michalopoulos*: There's no trace. I don't think it ever occurred to her to examine such things.

*Kropotkin*: I don't know why.

*Michalopoulos*: She's a very curious woman in many ways.

*Kropotkin*: A selfish woman, I think.

*Bryson*: But, Princess, aren't you and Mr. Michalopoulos painting a picture here that's essentially surprising? Not Strachey's picture so much as what you have added to it. Strachey gives you this woman with her stubbornness, her sense of duty, and her sense of dedication, and her remoteness and aloofness from her people; but you're saying that all these things that make Britain great today are things that came in spite of her.

*Kropotkin*: England was developing in democracy because of the prosperity that came and because of the peace, I think.

*Michalopoulos*: And Victoria gave all those things. She had great stability. She was a great woman and a great queen.

*Kropotkin*: She was a sensible woman. She was a respectable woman. I think that that helped a lot.

*Michalopoulos*: She was horribly respectable!

*Bryson*: Well, of course, respectability is one of the things we all admire, but what you seem to be saying here—and I'm not sure that Strachey would agree with you, although he gave you the evidence for it—is that if you give stability to a country that has possibilities, and give it a certain amount of basic freedom, the greatness in the country will come out.

*Kropotkin*: Oh, I am convinced of that. Any country!

*Michalopoulos*: Any country that has vitality in it will be great in spite of its rulers.

*Bryson*: I wonder if you both realize that what you're saying is that the welfare state is a mistake because you don't need to do things for people. You just need to get out of their way.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, that certainly wouldn't have anything to do with a welfare state. You're rooting for the welfare state, Mr. Bryson?

*Bryson*: Too late to ask me that question now, Mr. Michalopoulos. But I think it is a most surprising tribute to Strachey's book, that it launches us into such a discussion as we have had of the modern world as it is reflected in England in the nineteenth century.

# RICHARDSON

## *Pamela*

AGNES ROGERS

• PIERRE SZAMEK

• LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* *Pamela* is one of those books that our ancestors cried about, and we seem to be more apt to laugh about. I suspect that the basic problem has not changed, however, and that it's only the quaintness of the eighteenth century way of telling it and a certain air of what to me is still rather sticky sentimentality that makes one think that perhaps it's not a *real* story, of *real* people. What is it about?

*Rogers:* Well, the sub-title of the book is *Virtue Rewarded*.

*Bryson:* There's very little relation, generally, between sub-heads and contents, Miss Rogers.

*Rogers:* Well, in this case, I think it is exactly what the book is about. The theme is: Be virtuous and you get your reward! And in this particular book, virtue is a very specific woman's virtue. And by resisting the efforts of this black-hearted Mr. B—, although he later turns out to be pure-hearted, she is rewarded. She resists steadfastly all sorts of threats and blandishments, and there she is on the five-yard line over and over and over again. But by holding out, you see, and by resisting, she finally wins her rich and handsome husband and then reforms him.

*Szamek:* Miss Rogers, if you will permit me to disagree with you, I do completely. I think that *Pamela* is a rather dazzling picture of the perverseness and the contrariness of woman. We have here a creature who is undecided, who is unreliable, who believes in a moral *quid pro quo*, with somewhat more *pro* and somewhat less *quid*.

*Bryson:* Perhaps she only pretends to be unreliable. Aren't you willing, Mr. Szamek, to expand your statement a little and say that, from the beginning, *Pamela* knew exactly what she was doing? She was selling her virtue in the best market she could get, for the highest price.

*Szamek:* That is precisely what she is doing.

*Bryson:* But there was no uncertainty about it. She knew what

she wanted. She wanted a rich, handsome, well-placed husband. She was after it, and she got it.

*Szamek*: Her reflections in this respect are almost prismatic. She changes, chameleon-like, from one side to the other constantly. In one moment she is the virtuous maiden offended by this black beast, Mr. B—, her master, to whom she is not bonded, but in an almost bonded state, because he carts her off, which is tantamount to kidnapping; he has her imprisoned on his estate; he attempts to have her by force; he keeps her locked in a room; she calls him all sorts of unpleasant names. Then she suddenly decides, when he is ready to offer marriage, that he is the most charming, the most gracious, the most decent and nicest of all mankind.

*Rogers*: Mr. Szamek, if that isn't sheer dedication to a course of action, I never heard of any.

*Bryson*: You don't see any uncertainty in it?

*Rogers*: No uncertainty at all. The fact that she changes her tactics from time to time is one thing. Her strategy—have I got it right?—her strategy is unwavering.

*Bryson*: You see, Mr. Szamek, Miss Rogers is going to agree with me in a much heavier indictment of womankind than you are. This is a little schemer.

*Szamek*: I disagree in the definition of the word "strategy" and "stratagem." I think that she's more guilty of the latter than the former.

*Rogers*: She uses stratagem in her strategy.

*Bryson*: You don't think she has any long-term plan?

*Szamek*: I think not, originally. I think she's a nasty little trickster. She's a thoroughly unpleasant person.

*Bryson*: Not to the people of the eighteenth century.

*Szamek*: No, no! Not at all. She is virtue embodied; she's on a crystalline altar, pure and undefiled. But, to me, she is a trickster.

*Rogers*: Oh, to me, too.

*Bryson*: Well, she was pure and undefiled on that altar because she kicked with her pretty little feet at any hands that reached up at her, until they were the right hands, bearing the right gifts. Now, why did the people of the eighteenth century weep copious tears?

*Rogers*: I have a little theory about that—and it's very pretentious of me to have a theory, but you will allow me to have it, won't you?—that the eighteenth century, being a time of such a strict code of politeness—Lord Chesterfield says you may smile but you may not laugh—the outward restraint of manners was such that they cracked from time to time; people couldn't quite keep it up, and they fell on *Pamela* unabashed. They loved it so.

*Bryson*: It was a kind of an Aristotelian catharsis, in eighteenth century terms, do you think?

*Rogers*: I do, indeed! Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote to her daughter something to this effect: "What a queer fellow this Richardson is! I perfectly despise him. I read him, I can't put him down, and I sob over him." It's the same thing that made people

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read those wonderful Gothic extravagances like *The Castle of Otranto*.

*Szamek*: You see, Mr. Bryson, we disagree on definition again. You say "Aristotelian catharsis." I think the experience was more nearly purgative. When we have this clash between the man and the woman, the man is totally defenseless, because of this matter of virtue being upon an altar. But we must remember again what the situation is in which Pamela finds herself.

*Bryson*: Or puts herself. Pamela could have escaped, up to the time of the actual kidnapping, at any time; she was not in any necessity to stay there and be attacked.

*Szamek*: The situation there is this: we find a young girl who, from the age of 12 to 15—she's somewhat over 15 at the time we first meet her—has been the serving maid to a lady of means, in a fashionable British household of this period. The lady dies and, suddenly, the young master begins to throw covetous glances in her direction. The situation becomes more intense as his glances become more intense. And, gradually, she decides that the only thing for her to do is to return to her parents. But then she begins her vacillation. What to do? Shall she go or shall she not go? And she could, if she wished to.

*Bryson*: Well, there was never any reason why she had to stay, Mr. Szamek. And this uncertainty that you talk about might possibly be the result of the fact that Richardson, after all, was a printer and started this because he wanted something he could print and sell—he was in a sense the Dale Carnegie of his day—and had been asked to write some letters that showed how letters should be written. Probably, when the book began as a series of letters to tell people how to write, Richardson hadn't quite made up his mind about these characters. I'm quite sure Richardson, when he began the first volume of this interminable book—the first volume takes us up to the marriage, and the second volume is something that he wrote as a profitable sequel—didn't know what he was going to do, except that he was going to save that girl from a fate worse than death.

*Rogers*: Oh, I think he was going to preach a sermon. Perhaps it grew as he went along, but he was going to preach a sermon that would tell the proud, rich people that they ought to be good, and the poor that, if they kept on being virtuous, they would be rewarded.

*Bryson*: Isn't it important to note, too, that this is the first book—at least it's the first one I can remember in English literature—in which the morals of a person of low social position are considered of any importance, or in which a moral problem of a servant is worth writing about? The morals of servants are a joke to Chaucer; they're a joke to Shakespeare; they're a joke through most of European literature. Here's a man who wrote about the poor as well as the snobs of his time. Of course that's partly because the poor of his time are beginning to read.

*Rogers*: And he treats the poor girl with great sympathy.

*Bryson*: Does he? You say that he makes her out a terrible minx. Did he intend to? Is that what he thought?

*Szamek*: Perhaps not, but he is sorry for her, nonetheless.

*Rogers*: The treatment is rather saccharine. What we see here is a girl trying to protect her virtue and a man who is trying to have her by force. He presses his suit and she does the penance.

*Bryson*: But I think the real proof of his honesty—and I'm willing to give this prolix old moralist a good deal of credit—is the way he treats the Cinderella theme, which goes back as far as we know about anything in literature: the poor girl gets everything. But this is one of the very first times, if not the first time, that the poor girl does not turn out to have been a princess in disguise. It is really virtue and beauty which conquer. It's not virtue and beauty which should have indicated from the beginning that this is really the princess. Pamela isn't a princess.

*Rogers*: She isn't a princess. However, Richardson doesn't quite dare to go the whole way. You will remember that her parents, although in reduced circumstances—in fact, her poor father is digging ditches for a farmer—are, however, people of good stock. He makes that plain.

*Bryson*: They are yeomen.

*Rogers*: Yes, but she is not of actual servant class of those days. She's a little above that.

*Bryson*: She's not a person whom Mr. B— should have been expected to marry by his companions, nor did she have it easy when she did marry him, because they looked down upon her.

*Szamek*: Well, he admits that himself in one of the few moments in which Mr. B— doesn't live up to his past reputation. Mr. B— points out to her that, if he were to marry her, then she would be exposed to the ridicule and the painful responses of the neighbors, the gentry of the area, who would probably consider her to be no more than what she always was, a serving wench.

*Bryson*: And, of course, she actually slays them with her wit and beauty, almost from the beginning.

*Szamek*: Oh yes. Even his sister—do you remember, that was one of the great hurdles—his sister who was so outraged.

*Bryson*: She treated the poor girl abominably.

*Szamek*: She was simply awful. But you remember how Pamela always succeeds. She has a rather sly way of doing it. She always agrees. She constantly agrees. One could almost say that she stoops to concur. Whatever is said to her, she accepts.

*Rogers*: Mr. Szamek, do you remember her own very disarming—in fact, I thought, very cunning—response when Mr. B— says to her just the thing that you mentioned a second ago: "How would you fill your days? You'd be so lonely." She paints a picture of that absolutely perfect wife who'd be there when wanted: she would prepare candies, and she would take over all the finances, because she's been taught so to do; and she would improve her music.

*Bryson*: That should have ended the romance at that moment. He should have said, "Well, I don't want anybody like that around."

*Szamek*: But she paints a very rosy picture—that she will be the ideal wife in bed, board and kitchen.

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*Bryson*: That's right, but not in terms that you'd think would appeal to Mr. B— who's had a somewhat wild career up to that time. Why does he suddenly turn out to be the model husband, in the most priggish and over-moralistic way? That's the magic of her personality?

*Rogers*: Yes. It is supposed to be.

*Bryson*: Isn't that completely unconvincing?

*Rogers*: Completely! Also completely unconvincing is the fact that Pamela, who is so wonderful that she could have had anybody if she just cast an eye at them, should bother with this wretched fellow.

*Bryson*: Of course, he paid her very high compliments.

*Szamek*: He did. But he certainly doesn't remain the ideal husband, always. There are occasional strays down the sinister side of the primrose path.

*Bryson*: Ah, but Mr. Szamek, that's in the second volume, which nobody ever reads.

*Szamek*: Well, I read it and found in it some rather appealing passages—for instance, the scenes in which we see Pamela as the wronged wife, when at the masquerade Mr. B— meets a charming countess, attired as a nun, who permits him to peer under her mask, and they become quite friendly, until Pamela discovers the situation and takes over in characteristic fashion, moralizing at great length on the wrongs which have been done her.

*Bryson*: Why did Richardson do that? Did he want to show that the change in Mr. B— was still in process, or did he just simply have another incident to carry on these interminable letters? After all, having once adopted the letter form, he had to build a continual series of incidents which could be talked about. Something had to happen, and he had to go on indefinitely. That's the way he was making a lot of money. Wasn't he just inventing things to keep things going?

*Szamek*: Well, many of the situations which he does pull out of his grab bag eventually are just stock scenes, taken out of the chronicles or out of the past comic *bouffe* works. Surely, many of the situations in *Pamela* are pure opera *bouffe*. Such a scene, for instance, is that in which we find Mr. B— trying to force his attentions upon the unwilling Pamela, disguising himself in the clothes of a serving maid and concealing himself in her room, to suddenly reveal himself with great fury and gusto and seize upon this helpless, virtuous girl, who is more than half-willing, but who, at the opportune moment, or inopportune moment, always conceals her true feelings by fainting dead away.

*Bryson*: She was very skillful at that.

*Rogers*: What about those fits? She was constantly falling into a fit. I don't believe that. Do you?

*Bryson*: You think she was a minx, after all?

*Rogers*: Oh, we all agree, don't we, on that?

*Bryson*: Well, there are little differences as to what kind of a minx she was. Outside of Pamela, however, and Mr. B—, what about the other people with whom these two warring characters asso-

ciate. After all, this is *Thurber's War of the Sexes* in one of its best forms. How do you feel about the people in the background? Her poor but honest parents, his outrageously snobbish relatives, the gentry of the county who fall for Pamela the moment they are told that she really is going to be Mr. B—'s wife and so on—are those real people?

*Rogers*: They're conveniences. I think they're nothing but trimmings. The poor but honest parents! Of course, they have suspicions!

*Bryson*: Suspicions? They spend all their time praying, practically, that their daughter will hold out!

*Szamek*: They are the furniture upon which Pamela can hang her virtue to display it for the edification of all of the happy readers.

*Bryson*: And to whom she can write letters, Mr. Szamek.

*Szamek*: Yes, indeed.

*Bryson*: She has to write letters. She interrupts almost any love passage to dash away and write a letter about it before she forgets exactly what is now happening.

*Szamek*: It must be a pleasant existence to spend one's time defending one's virtue and writing letters. She's quite content with her life, certainly.

*Bryson*: Especially if you get a big estate.

*Rogers*: I haven't any comment to make on that. I don't think it would be suitable.

*Szamek*: And to find the proceedings financially rewarding, as she certainly does.

*Rogers*: I think, however, that the parents also realized that they had something pretty good in Pamela, that she was in a very good position, and so they did their best to fortify her and support her.

*Bryson*: All right. Now, aren't we saying here, whether we intend to or not, that Mr. Richardson was not quite as honest a moralist as he pretended to be, and that he really was having some fun with his situations? Certainly, the background characters are often pure satire. And he is saying—I think I give him credit for honesty in this—he is saying an honest girl, even in the eighteenth century—and that's part of what is reviewed here, the helplessness of women in the eighteenth century when they had no chance to make a decent living—would be rewarded.

*Szamek*: And yet, certainly he does not review their ignorance. Pamela, a girl of fairly low degree, is a girl of great wit and a master at turning a pretty phrase. There are a few which leap to the mind instantly. When she speaks of the woman, Mrs. Dukes, who was her warden when she was imprisoned, and describes "the fat Mrs. Dukes" appearing "as if she had been pickled a month in saltpeter"; or when she speaks of Mr. B— approaching her with a sort of "reined-in rap-ture"; or when she bemoans her outcast state and says, "Alas, I am a tennis ball of fortune."

*Bryson*: She writes beautiful letters. Mr. Richardson certainly knew how to write. Well, considering the Cinderella theme perennially put forward, what's the difference between this and the way it would be written now? Can you imagine the Cinderella theme now? What do we think about this problem of the woman who, in order to

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earn a decent living, gets herself into a situation where she has to defend herself against a dishonest man? Would we tell it this way?

*Rogers:* It seems nonsensical.

*Bryson:* You say "women are here to stay." Is this kind of woman here to stay?

*Rogers:* No, I don't think so.

*Bryson:* What's the change in the situation, Miss Rogers?

*Rogers:* Well, it may be that we're more moral or less moral, depending on how you look at it.

*Bryson:* Well, how do you look at it?

*Rogers:* That we're more moral.

*Bryson:* How?

*Rogers:* Simply because I think we do not at the moment regard all men as chasing around after women; and the last thing they want to do is to marry them.

*Szamek:* They don't have to chase now; they did then.

*Rogers:* The women chased in *Pamela*, in their own sly way.

*Szamek:* Neither have to chase now. It's merely a question of waiting supinely for an attack, more or less. That attack is mounted on more gracious terms, perhaps. But that, I think, is the principal change in our morality.

*Bryson:* I think if Mr. Szamek had written your book, *Women Are Here to Stay*, Miss Rogers, he would have put in the word "unfortunately."

*Rogers:* I still don't know who's attacking whom, Mr. Szamek.

*Szamek:* You mean now or in *Pamela*?

*Rogers:* Now. Now.

*Szamek:* Now. I think it's a mutual disengagement, in militaristic terms, which means an equal retreat and an equal advance. We have reached much more of a balanced harmony.

*Bryson:* Well, why is it more moral now, Miss Rogers? Mr. Szamek appears to think it's more moral because it's fought on more even terms.

*Rogers:* More nearly even terms. But I still don't quite warm up to this battle business. We're so military. I'd like to think that marriage today is the coming together by mutual agreement of two compatible and loving people, without the line of battle.

*Szamek:* But I wasn't speaking of marriage, Miss Rogers. I was speaking of the preliminaries.

*Rogers:* Oh!

*Szamek:* When it comes to marriage, then, like Mr. B—, the matter starts to simmer down slowly. It is the preliminary which is interesting and which he points out himself when he warns Pamela, in a very interesting little sequence—he adjures her, in fact—that she should be careful of her dress after their marriage, because all too often a woman, once she has her man, tends to become lax; and he warns her he likes to rise early in the morning to have his chocolate, and he begs that she be properly attired, so that he will never lose interest.

*Bryson:* That has a curiously modern sound.



*Rogers*: It is rather bright.

*Bryson*: But does a person who goes to *Pamela* now—of course, most people who read *Pamela* now do so because they're assigned to read it in a classroom—does a person who goes fresh and innocent to *Pamela* now find here a depiction of this perennial problem of the war between the sexes that he can take seriously?

*Rogers*: I would think not.

*Bryson*: Why?

*Rogers*: Well, as I said before, the very business of the man's extreme reluctance to the very condition of marriage seems to us a little silly. I mean, that he would do anything rather than marry would seem to us a little silly.

*Szamek*: He will go even to the extent of making a formal contract with her, in a rather extraordinary document in which he sends her a catalogue of all the items which he will give to her upon her accession, up to the barrier of marriage, but not passing that.

*Bryson*: But if we put it that way, I think we have to add the fact that in those times the marriage was not only just marriage. He wasn't just avoiding marriage; he was avoiding marriage with a servant girl. And that was a very important thing.

*Rogers*: Yes, because since that time, of course, there has been developing, and especially in our country, the fluid society, which means that people come up and some, of course, slide down. It's very difficult for us to think of the stratification of a class society as rigid as this was. And that is probably the main thing that makes it very difficult for us to take it seriously.

*Bryson*: Well, in those days a woman could scarcely rise, except by marriage. She had almost no other way of changing her status.

*Szamek*: But, actually, Pamela is not representative of her class. She rises well above it. Just as Tess of the D'Urbervilles is certainly a rather uncommon milkmaid, so Pamela is a person of wit and flashing repartee, in her rather ingenuous manner.

*Bryson*: She certainly is. But there, again—and this, it seems to me, we have to give the old boy credit for, tiresome and dishonestly moralistic as he is—she's not a princess in disguise. She's still a servant girl. She learned it on her own, out of her own experience.

*Szamek*: She is much more than a princess, because many of the princesses and ladies were considerable oafs at the time, and she was not.

*Bryson*: That's a modern statement. To people of that time she couldn't be more than servant. I mean, blood was the last thing—except to Richardson.

*Rogers*: Except that Richardson is constantly being attacked for not giving a true picture of the aristocracy.

*Bryson*: Well, he made satirical attacks upon the aristocracy because he wanted to compare it with the true virtue of this incomparable girl, who got what she wanted, finally, by using her charm and her impregnable virtue against a man who was determined to have her. And when he did get her, she made almost a saint out of him.

# Notes and Footnotes

ANTHONY TROLLOPE WAS BORN IN LONDON, APRIL 24, 1815. HIS BOYHOOD WAS awkward, confusing, anything but promising. The trials and tribulations of his early years—his haphazard education, his abject unhappiness are candidly revealed in his *Autobiography*. A further insight to his youth is described in the character of Johnny Eames, a self-portrait, in his novel *The Small House At Allington*. At nineteen, Trollope entered the ranks of the Post Office and remained in the civil service until 1867. He is credited with the invention of the pillar postbox. Travelling as a postal official, he was afforded an opportunity to visit many countries where he recorded his observations for publication. His first two novels, dealing with Irish themes, were written in Ireland where he lived and worked for approximately seventeen years. Anthony's older brother, Thomas Adolphus Trollope was likewise a novelist, as was his mother Frances Milton Trollope. After living a rather obscure life, Mrs. Trollope's first flash of fame came at the age of fifty, with the publication of her caustic reflections on the *Domestic Manners of Americans*, which she wrote after a visit to the United States. Anthony Trollope, who was credited with over a half-hundred novels, died in 1882.

JANE AUSTEN WHO HAS BEEN CALLED A CYNIC AND A HEINE IN PETTICOATS, AND compared to Chaucer, Shakespeare and Molière was born at Steventon in Hampshire on December 16, 1775, the seventh of eight children of a clergyman. Viewing life through the glass of a satirist, Jane turned her back on the troubled times she lived in, closeting herself in the contented world of rural England with its country gentry and upper middle-class. Her creative scope was circumscribed—limited to social and family relationships. A fastidious writer—though not as prolific as some of her contemporaries—Jane Austen's major novels run to six, some of which were rewritten and revised; *Pride and Prejudice*, originally appearing as *First Impressions* in 1796, was revised to its present title in 1812.

HENRIK IBSEN (1826-1906), NORWEGIAN POET AND DRAMATIST, TURNED FROM early essays in journalism to an association with the national theatre, first in Bergen and later in Copenhagen. He had written poetry, criticism, and a few plays before producing *Love's Comedy* (1862), a satirical play in verse which, like its more famous successors, roused a storm of criticism. It was followed by *The Pretenders* and by the great dramatic poems *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. In Germany, where he lived from 1874 to 1891, Ibsen wrote, at intervals of about two years, the series of realistic social dramas on which his fame rests, *Hedda Gabler* making its appearance in 1890.

THE THREE BRONTE SISTERS HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF AS MANY WORKS, BOTH critical and biographical, as their own literary output. The genus of the biography stems in part from the autobiographical character of some of the novels. In 1824, at the age of eight, Charlotte (the first born of six children) was sent to the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge. Maria and Elizabeth, two of her sisters, were brought home the next year to die of tuberculosis. Charlotte laid the blame at the administrator's office for tolerating unsanitary conditions and allowing a code of harsh discipline to prevail;

in *Jane Eyre* she vents her anger at the school, and the administrator in the person of Mr. Brocklehurst. Charlotte's four novels have been described as variations upon a theme—her own story of frustrated passion. Her reliance upon her own emotional experiences as a source-well is regarded as the inspiration for the then new vogue in English fiction of creating novels against the canvas of the writer's own personal consciousness.

JOHN STUART MILL (1806-1873) WAS BORN IN LONDON, THE SON OF THE ECONOMIST and historian James Mill. Under his father's skillful and intensive instruction, he began to read Greek at three, Latin at eight, and political economy at thirteen—meanwhile browsing widely in English literature and philosophy. Under the influence of his father and Ricardo and Malthus, logic and political economy became his chief interests as he grew older. However, in contrast with James Mill, who, like Plato, had no use for poets, John Stuart Mill became appreciative of the arts, and was as susceptible to Wordsworth's poetry as to Comte's positivist philosophy. Like his father, John was an employee of India House, and eventually became its head. Among his important works are *A System of Logic*, *Principles of Political Economy*, *On Liberty*, and his *Autobiography*.

ALTHOUGH RACINE'S PHEDRE WAS HIS FINEST DRAMA OF THE SERIES OF GREEK tragedies it has been considered his unluckiest. Within a week of its appearance at the Hotel de Bourgogne, on New Year's Day, 1677, a rival company spurred on by the influential enemies of Racine produced a *Phedre* by Nicolas Pradon, who had been employed to write it by the Duchess of Bouillon. Racine's production, considered the finest tragedy in the French Classical tradition, was practically driven from the stage, while the rival company's efforts were a positive success. During the next twenty years, the almost complete silence which Racine imposed upon himself was broken by the appearance of his last two tragedies, *Esther* which was written at the behest of Madame deMaintenon for presentation at Saint Cyr, and *Athalie*, considered by many his finest drama.

MARIAN EVANS ASSUMED THE PSEUDONYM GEORGE ELIOT IN 1857 WHEN HER first works of fiction were published in *Blackwood's*. She was born in Warwickshire, November 22, 1819. Her eager childhood experiences as the daughter of Robert Evans, land agent, are recaptured in her earlier books. An insight into her intensely earnest nature is revealed in her self-portrait as Maggie, in *The Mill on the Floss*. It was while working on the staff of the *Westminster Review*, where she came in close touch with the group of London intellectuals, that she met George Henry Lewes, with whom she later lived. Under his encouragement she embarked, with new vigor, upon her career as a novelist.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856-1950) SPARRED WITH THE WORLD, INSINUATING his ideas from the relatively untouchable position of the man without a country. Born in Dublin of Yorkshire blood, amidst poverty and struggle, Shaw gravitated to the precincts of the Fabian Society, writing their *Manifesto* in 1884. Gifted with a natural talent for forensics, Shaw became a hard-hitting protagonist for the Socialist movement. Boundless in energy, he used the medium of the drama, which he found a painless method of projecting ideas to expose the evils that festered on society. Shaw's rejection of Neo-Darwinism became evident in the cycle of five plays *Back To Methuselah* but reached the apex with his writing of *Saint Joan*. His arguments for a restatement of religious mythology in modern terms is eloquently presented in the hundred-page preface to the play. The appearance of the play, soon after Joan was raised to sainthood by the Church, created a stir—for here was a former self-professed atheist bowing at the feet of a heroine of religion.

THOMAS HARDY WAS BORN JUNE 2, 1840 IN DORSETSHIRE, IN THE HEART OF THE region he was to immortalize as Wessex. Although his father, a building contractor, wished him for the church, Hardy, instead, became an ecclesiastical architect. He pursued other interests independently, studying Latin and Greek, painting and the theatre. He attended evening classes at the University of London. According to some critics, his building background and architectural training are found in evidence in his writings. Hardy devoted twenty-five years to fiction, concerning himself entirely with poetry after 1895, until his death in 1928.

THE "DE-PEDESTALIZING" OF POPULAR IDOLS AND THE ASSAILING OF DOCTRINE AND pretentiousness were characteristics of the early twentieth century. Giles Lytton Strachey looms large as the most brilliant in this field of deglamourizing. Relying on irony, urbanity and ultra-sophistication, Strachey stripped the great of their ornate trappings, laying bare the hollowness of their pretentiousness. His *Queen Victoria* is notable for his departure in method, as sampled in his *Eminent Victorians*; bowing to the evidence of genuine greatness he remains to praise the queen rather than scoff.

ALTHOUGH SAMUEL RICHARDSON ENTERED THE SECOND HALF-CENTURY OF HIS life without any literary credits of note, he died one of the famous novelists of the world. He was born the son of a cabinet-maker in Derbyshire in 1689. Poverty-stricken he was unable to follow a career in the ministry, and instead was apprenticed to a printer. He married into his master's family, and eventually he became Master of the Stationer's Company. It was while working on a series of letters he was commissioned to write for a firm of book-sellers, that he recalled an interesting true-life story, that eventually was published as *Pamela* in 1740. This book, glorifying all the concepts that Puritan morality held most dear, struck a responsive chord among many. Its popularity was enormous; it appeared as a dramatic adaptation of Garrick's and in a special edition for children; and inspired no less than sixteen imitations, plus a play authored by Voltaire.

# Selected Bibliography

The selections made in this bibliography cover the books discussed on *Invitation To Learning* during 1951; the editions given were made on the basis of quality of text and economy of price. These editions are available in many cases in your local library and bookshop. Those having difficulty in obtaining them, may order from our Readers Service Bureau. Simply address your request, plus remittance to:

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*Seven Famous Greek Plays*; Modern Library, \$1.25. Contains famous works of Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Aristophanes.

*Tragedies of Shakespeare*; Modern Library, \$1.25. Includes *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*; Book 1, Great Books Series, Henry Regnery Co., 40c; Empiricus' *Philosophical Works*, 4 v., \$3.00 ea., Harvard Univ. Press.

*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume; Included in *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*, edited with an intro. by Prof. E. A. Burt; Modern Library Giant, \$2.45. This volume also includes, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (selections) and J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*.

*Dialogues of the Dead*, Lucian; in his *Dialogues, History and Selected Essays*, Great Books Series, Regnery, 80c.

*Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in his *Complete Works*, Modern Library Giant, \$2.45; trans. by M. Jacques Clercq.

*Ethics I, Politics I; Poetics I, Ethics II*; Aristotle, Selections included in Great Books Series, Regnery. Both volumes \$1.00; also included and discussed in *Introduction to Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeown. Modern Library, \$1.25.

*Comedies*, Moliere, in *Plays* by Moliere; Modern Library, \$1.25; intro. by Waldo Frank.

*Meditations*, Aurelius—in Great Books Series, Regnery, 60c. Also in Everyman Library Series, No. 9, Dutton, \$1.45.

*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin; in Calvin, *Institutes* (selections), Great Books Series, Regnery, 40c.

*The Aeneid*, Virgil; in *Virgil's Works*, Modern Library, \$1.25.

*The Nibelungenlied*; in *Song of the Volsungs and Nibelungs*. Great Books Series, Regnery, 80c.

*De Re Metallica*, Agricola; edited with an intro. and notes by Herbert Hoover, Dover Publications, \$10.00.

*Notebooks of DaVinci*; Random House, \$15.00.

*The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*Pragmatism*, William James—in *The Philosophy of William James*; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*Athalie*, Racine; in Corneille and Racine, *Six Plays*; Modern Library, \$1.25; also includes *Phèdre*.

*Discourse on Method*, Descartes; Great Books Series, Regnery, 40c.

- The Origin of the Species*, Darwin; Modern Library Giant, \$2.45.
- History*, Herodotus; selections in *The Persian Wars*, Modern Library, \$1.25.
- The French Revolution—A History*, Thomas Carlyle; Modern Library Giant, \$2.45.
- Orley Farm*, Anthony Trollope; Knopf, \$5.00, also Oxford World's Classics, 2 v. each \$1.10.
- Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy; Modern Library, \$1.25.
- Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen; Modern Library, \$1.25, also includes her *Sense and Sensibility*.
- The Short Bible*, Edited by Goodspeed and Smith, Modern Library, \$1.25. Also *The Holy Bible*, old and new testaments with concordance, World Publishing Co., \$2.50.
- Queen Victoria*, Lytton Strachey; Harcourt Brace, \$1.75.
- Saint Joan*, Bernard Shaw; Dodd, \$3.00.
- Subjection of Women*, J. S. Mill, Everyman Library, \$1.45.
- Mill On The Floss*, George Eliot; in *Best Known Novels of George Eliot*, Modern Library Giant, \$2.45.
- Letters to her Daughter and Friends*, Marie DeSevigne; compiled by Richard Aldington, Dutton, \$7.50.
- Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen, in his *Eleven Plays*, intro. by H. L. Mencken, Modern Library Giant, \$2.45.
- Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte; Modern Library, \$1.25.
- Pamela*, Samuel Richardson; Everyman Library, 2 v. \$1.45 each.
- Progress and Poverty*, Henry George; An inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increases of want with increase of wealth; The remedy. Modern Library, \$1.25.
- Our Mutual Friend*, Charles Dickens; New Century Library, \$3.00.
- Plays of Oscar Wilde*; Modern Library, \$1.25.
- On Liberty, Utilitarianism, & On Representative Government*, John Stuart Mill; Everyman's Library, \$1.45.
- The Ambassadors*, Henry James; One of James' most famous novels dealing with the mission of two ambassadors, a man and a woman, sent abroad one after the other by a wealthy American woman to find out what holds her son in Paris. Harpers, \$3.00.
- Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald; The Living Library Edition of the Persian-English classic poem printed in two colors and illustrated by Joseph Low. World Publishing, \$1.25.
- Eight Famous Plays*, August Strindberg; Scribners, \$4.50.
- Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, Oliver Wendell Holmes; Houghton Mifflin, \$2.50 (available July 1952).
- Dreamers of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill; Tudor, \$2.50.
- First Principles*, Herbert Spencer; Appleton (out of print).
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- Diana of the Crossways*, George Meredith; Modern Library, \$1.25.



Winter 1951-52

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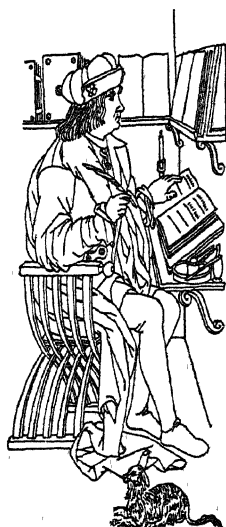
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DISCUSSIONS OF GREAT BOOKS AND SIGNIFICANT IDEAS

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George, **PROGRESS AND POVERTY**

Dickens, **OUR MUTUAL FRIEND**

Wilde, **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST**

Mill, **ON LIBERTY**

James, **THE AMBASSADORS**

Fitzgerald, **THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM**

Strindberg, **THE FATHER**

Holmes, **THE AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST TABLE**

Zangwill, **DREAMERS OF THE GHETTO**

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# *Invitation To Learning*

DISCUSSIONS OF GREAT BOOKS AND SIGNIFICANT IDEAS

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*Edited by* GEORGE CROTHERS

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MARK VAN DOREN, Poet, critic, and Professor of English, Columbia University.

# HENRY GEORGE

## *Progress and Poverty*

LEO CHERNE

•

HARRY GIDEONSE

•

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* We sometimes think of our grandfathers as people who didn't care about reforming the world with the same intensity and passion as ours, having a less obviously disturbed world to think about. But they were concerned with reform, and they were divided into several groups—groups that had different convictions as to how the problem of reform could be attacked. At this distance, Henry George seems to be almost the mildest of the reform leaders of that time. Yet, in his own day, he struck people as profoundly radical.

*Gideonse:* I think that's partly due to the fact that people have come to think of Henry George and of this particular book of his as a "one-idea book." They think of it as the single-tax Bible.

*Bryson:* It's more than that, Mr. Gideonse?

*Gideonse:* Oh, much more than that! In fact, I would be disposed to challenge some of Henry George's most loyal supporters and say that the single-tax idea is not very important in the book as it now stands, and that the kind of emphasis that is being put on it is rather unsound. The book as it stands is one of the classics of freedom, and in many ways a radical statement of the American social conscience at its best—all within the framework of free competitive enterprise, and within the kind of respect for human individuality and personality that I personally associate with private property, although Henry George does not do that.

*Cherne:* With the exception of *Looking Backward*, I know of no other volume which has had as great an impact upon both American radical thought and the current of American political development.

*Bryson:* Elsewhere than in America, too.

*Cherne:* Oh yes, throughout the world! In many places with greater effect, actually, than within the United States.

*Gideonse:* George was very influential in England, for instance, where he lectured and had a good deal to do with giving the English Labor Party its steer away from Marxism and emphasis on class

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struggle ideology, and toward a more gradualist concern with reform that was respectful of human personality. George Bernard Shaw somewhere made the statement that, after he had read *Progress and Poverty*, he felt drunk—drunk, that is, with the eloquence of the statement and with the cogency of the logic. The book is a remarkable example of that. Not just in the past; it is that today when you read it.

*Cherne*: In terms of permanent effect upon history, more significant than his influence upon the British Fabians, incidentally, was his influence upon the British Liberals. Lloyd George was one of those deeply affected by Henry George. But, of greater lasting importance to us, particularly in these days in which China is of such great consequence to us, is the effect that Henry George had upon Sun Yat Sen and the whole current of modern Chinese thinking.

*Bryson*: Now, Mr. Cherne, that brings into very sharp focus something that Mr. Gideonse said a moment ago. He spoke of George as contrasted with the Marxists, and as contrasted with the Socialists. Certainly he was not, even in the Fabian sense, a Socialist; he did believe in private property, except in one respect, and that for a very special reason. When you say China, you don't mean that Chinese Communism is a natural development out of the thinking of Henry George.

*Cherne*: Oh, not at all. As in the case of many things which were influenced by an earlier development, the result may be entirely unnatural; but the influence is still there.

*Bryson*: Isn't that one of the most important things to consider about Henry George? He was, roughly, a late contemporary of Marx. He was radical in the same sense that Marx was. He didn't have the fortune or misfortune—I'm not quite sure which—of being institutionalized (as Marx was) into political movements so that a nation founded its reform upon him. That's never happened to Henry George. Maybe that was an advantage.

*Cherne*: It happened in small places.

*Bryson*: Yes, but not on a great scale, such as Russia's attempt to make Marxism a way of constructing a new nation. In fact, Mr. Gideonse, your reference to him was by way of contrast. He is completely different from Marx in most of his main thinking, isn't he?

*Gideonse*: Yes. I cannot think of an author who, in the main impact of his activity, his career, his work, and of this book, is more clearly the opposite of Karl Marx and what Karl Marx stands for. You said he was radical in the same sense as Karl Marx. You don't really mean that. He was radical but not in the same sense.

*Bryson*: What I mean is he's radical with a different content. He's radical in the sense that he believed that society could be profoundly changed to make it better. He goes to the root of things, but his ideas are completely different from Marx.

*Cherne*: Well, no one knew that more clearly than did Karl Marx. Karl Marx at one point, after reading Henry George and after being deeply disturbed by the great American interest in Henry

George during that period of time, said quite caustically that Henry George and *Progress and Poverty* are the last ditch of capitalism.

*Bryson*: Perhaps Henry George would have said that's not a bad ditch to stop at. Capitalism was something he believed in.

*Gideonse*: That still is true today. I mean, someone who really knows Henry George's works, including not only *Progress and Poverty* but the very good and still quite excellent book on foreign trade, *Free Trade and Protection*, would be a well-armed opponent of most of the Marxist nonsense that is being perpetrated. Not only are the ideas there; they're there in a very eloquent form, and they're related all the time, in George's way of thinking and of stating the question, to a respect for human personality. The one basic sin of the Marxist approach is that he wanted to reform the world by sacrificing human personality. Culture, human values were all regarded as simply a secondary reflection of what you did to technology and the mode of production. None of that is in George. In George you have this constant dedication to the notion not only of free personality, but of free personality within a framework of religious values.

*Cherne*: I have a feeling that Henry George anticipated the growth of a Communist party, so violently opposed to everything he believed, in a paragraph toward the end of *Progress and Poverty* in which he said: "Whence shall come the new barbarians? Go through the squalid quarters of great cities and you may see even now their gathering hordes. How shall learning perish? Men will cease to read, and books will kindle fires and be turned into cartridges." I think he quite prophetically saw in this, without knowing exactly what shape it would take, the growth of Nazism, the growth of Communism, the growth of the great illiterate movements of the cities.

*Bryson*: Which he was profoundly opposed to, Mr. Cherne, not only theoretically, not only logically, not only as a thinker, but also as an apostle of liberty. But if you put aside for a moment this moving eloquence of his which, in spite of being a little old-fashioned, in spite of being Victorian, is still so valid and still means so much to us emotionally, what did he actually say? This man was not only an apostle of liberty, he also said that there is a remedy to this situation. What was it that he actually said?

*Cherne*: I'd like to try to summarize the six-hundred-page thesis in several sentences.

*Bryson*: You're a brave man, Mr. Cherne.

*Cherne*: I think this is what he said—and he said it quite clearly. He said that land is the great monopoly, perhaps the only important monopoly. He said that those who own the land own men; that whatever your political forms are, those political forms will not suffice against the preclusive ownership of land. He said that in the absence of public ownership of land, the effect will be that, as progress occurs, industrially, wages will go down; as we achieve larger and larger cities, with more and more people in them, there will be more and more hungry people. He said that the effect—and this follows directly from his title—of progress is to produce poverty; that there is only one answer to that poverty, and that is to own the land in com-

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munity. He proposed not to confiscate the land; he proposed, instead, to have the state tax the total value of the land in distinction from the buildings or the constructed property on the land. He was concerned solely with land.

*Bryson*: He didn't mind capital in use.

*Cherne*: Oh no, not at all. He was concerned solely with land, and he believed that if this one single tax on land were applied, a tax upon the total value of the land, then there would not only be no necessity for any other form of taxation—which is where the phrase "single tax" comes from—but that from that one step would flow all of the solutions to every community problem.

*Bryson*: All right. Here is the remedy of a great thinker for what he felt was a great evil and which we recognize as a great evil. How much of that remedy can we take as sound today? What do the economists say about this, Mr. Gideonse—those that you agree with?

*Gideonse*: That's a nice dig, but I shall pass over it.

*Bryson*: Well, there are quite a lot of them you agree with.

*Gideonse*: Some. But to stick to the question, with a little more charity, I think the first way to approach your question is to look at the modern world and notice that, with progress, poverty has not inevitably come. Wages are not only higher, in the sense that they are higher in money, but you can buy more with them, even with the present high cost of living. And over a period of time, with little ups and downs, that has been the major trend of economic development since George wrote the book.

*Cherne*: If I might put it a different way, the America that Henry George loved—and his love for America is very clear throughout the book—is the best refutation of the thesis that Henry George propounded. Everything, virtually everything, which has happened in the seventy-five years since *Progress and Poverty* was written, is a refutation of the single tax aspect of that book.

*Bryson*: Of that one aspect.

*Cherne*: Of that one aspect of this book.

*Gideonse*: I'm glad you're underlining that, because I think there's little doubt about that. That summary you gave is the correct summary of this book, if you're looking for that particular part of the message the man had to contribute. It's also true, of course, that today our emphasis falls—and George's emphasis really falls—on productivity as the explanation of increasing wages. And if an economy is economically progressive, it shows a very close relationship between the total productivity and wage rates.

*Cherne*: Well, Henry George, as a matter of fact, assumed that there would be an increase in productivity, not only in the capacity of the machine to turn out goods, but also in the increasing efficiency of the machine to do so. But he said that, to the extent that productivity increases the total wealth of the community, that wealth would go neither to the capitalist, the owner of the machinery, nor to the wage-earner, but would go, all of it and more, to the land-owner. Now, that just has not been true.

*Bryson*: Is it fair to say, then, Mr. Cherne, that George seemed

to over-emphasize the monopoly of land, as against other types of monopoly? Because there are injustices even in this America which has been such a success, are there not?

*Cherne*: Well, he not only over-emphasized that particular injustice—and there are strong elements of injustice in the private ownership of land that is not used—but he also underestimated other things. He underestimated the capacity of a free people to achieve an eradication of many injustices by other methods. For example, the income tax, as distinguished from the single land tax, has accomplished a great deal that Henry George wanted to see accomplished. You'd agree with that, wouldn't you, Mr. Gideonse?

*Gideonse*: Oh, absolutely. That is simply another illustration of the general effectiveness of the wide reading of the book and the influence of the idea, which was not so much confined to the tax idea as the notion that America owed it to itself to work continuously on the problem of equalizing economic opportunity. The income tax, perhaps in a somewhat exaggerated way today, is simply a reflection of that general drive. And that drive is one of the main drives of this book. You touched a moment ago on monopoly, Mr. Bryson. George says quite explicitly that all other monopolies are trivial in extent as compared with monopoly on land. That, of course, is one of the weaknesses of his analysis, because no one would say today, looking at contemporary America, or contemporary France, for instance, where, even when you introduce, under Marshall Plan, technical assistance, American capital, and knowledge and other skills in increasing the effectiveness of labor, that the worker does not see a corresponding increase in wages. The reason he doesn't see it is that there is very definitely a form of monopoly that has absolutely nothing to do with land-ownership, because, in French industry, the *entrepreneur*, the French employer, is very heavily, I would say, *cartelized*. That is not the word they use in France, but the idea is the same.

*Cherne*: Even where the cartel doesn't exist in France and in other European countries, there is an attitude toward the consumer, an attitude toward the total community, which produces many of the effects of monopoly. There is a profound difference between the way business is conducted here and in our entire attitude toward serving a community and that which prevails, for example, in France. If I were in France today, I must honestly say that I would read *Progress and Poverty* with a great deal more concern than I do when I read it as an American, applying it to the American society.

*Bryson*: Well then, Mr. Cherne, Henry George seems to have underestimated the capacity of the America in which he so thoroughly believed to put his basic ideas into effect, and in technical ways that he couldn't anticipate. Is that true?

*Cherne*: That's entirely true.

*Bryson*: In other words, we had more inventiveness, both in creating monopolies of other kinds and in controlling them, than could have been anticipated in the middle of the nineteenth century.

*Cherne*: And great inventiveness in eradicating the many social diseases of the period in which he lived—the period which gave birth

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to a great many utopian experiments. You said earlier in our discussion that many of us assume that, in the nineteenth century, our grandfathers had no interest in reform because they lived in a much simpler and much more pleasant period of time. Well, if anyone believes that, all it takes is a reading of *Progress and Poverty* to persuade him of quite the contrary. The America in which Henry George wrote was quite a brutal, ugly, sordid America.

*Bryson*: And the time produced great prophets of freedom that, to some extent, we can now thank for the changes that have come.

*Cherne*: Perhaps.

*Gideonse*: Not only was that intellectually true—and is it true today as we look at that period—but Henry George's contemporaries saw that in the man. After all, he was very nearly elected Mayor of New York City. As a matter of fact, I think he was elected; but with the traditional ethics of the professional politicians, enough ballots disappeared in the counting, so that he didn't get to be Mayor of New York. The second time he ran, he died during the campaign. And I remember having read somewhere that the public funeral he got at the time was the most significant popular demonstration that New York City had ever seen. All this indicates that he certainly must have been talking something that found a big response in the public mind.

*Bryson*: Was that due to an understanding of his technical remedy, or was it a response to the deep moral fervor of the man and his profound faith in what we think is central to Americanism?

*Cherne*: Quite honestly, Mr. Bryson, I think it was both. There is no doubt at all that the single tax had a very great appeal to a very great many people.

*Bryson*: Because it seemed simple.

*Cherne*: That's right. That's always the advantage of a simple remedy for complex problems. It's always the advantage of a one-facet remedy to complicated problems, and Henry George's proposal had that virtue. But in addition, there is also no doubt at all that Henry George's passion, which is conveyed throughout every page of the book, Henry George's belief, Henry George's dedication carried great conviction. His dedication was real. He was told before he accepted the nomination that, if he accepted that nomination, he would die in the course of the campaign. He had already suffered a severe heart attack. And he expressed himself quite candidly. He said he probably could not die in any more useful fashion, and, unhappily, he did die three days before the election.

*Bryson*: Isn't it characteristic of this man, and isn't this one of the things that distinguishes him profoundly from other great prophets of freedom and of advance, that he was willing to die himself. He wasn't so much interested in killing other people to bring about the kind of world that he believed in.

*Cherne*: I think there are other distinctions, too, in contrast with others who are more fanatic, who are more bigoted.

*Bryson*: He wasn't as fanatic in that sense, was he?

*Cherne*: No, not in any of those senses. Because of that he also



realized that there was very little probability that his proposal would be accepted, either in his lifetime or beyond his lifetime. His modesty, I think, reflects itself in these lines in the preface to *Progress and Poverty*, in which he said: "I propose to read and study, to write some things which will extend my reputation, and perhaps to deliver some lectures with the same view. If I live, I will make myself known—even in Philadelphia. I aim high."

*Gideonse*: Emphasis, in the contemporary reputation of the book, always seems to me to be most sadly misplaced when it is referred to as "a radical book," or "like Karl Marx." Although this stems from the same period as Marx, one must keep in mind that the emphasis throughout the book is on how to restore a genuinely productive society in competitive relationships again. George speaks right out in the opening part of the book where he states the problem, "while the professors may disagree." (He dealt with the professors in a rather cavalier way, and I must say they tended to deserve it. There is at least as much truth in this book for that period as there is in most of the other books written during that period by all sorts of responsible academic folk.) He says, "while professors thus disagree, the ideas that there is a necessary conflict between capital and labor, that machinery is an evil, that competition must be restrained and interest abolished, that wealth may be created by the issue of money . . ."—all of those, he says, are ideas that are rapidly making way among the great body of the people who keenly feel a hurt. Then he goes on to say that those are precisely the ideas that he is setting himself as a task to refute in the book. In other words, he sets out a thesis that is the opposite of most of what we today regard as radicalism and is an exact parallel of what most of us today would describe as a conservative position.

*Cherne*: He expressed very great concern several times in the book with the power of government, with the capacity of government to distort freedom and, finally, to destroy it. Henry George, you see, was deeply devoted to the concept of private property and decentralized society. Henry George had one passion. His passion was for the community ownership of land by one process or another. Henry George's guiding passion was his devotion to liberty. In his closing pages he says, "Only in broken gleams and partial light has the sun of liberty yet beamed among men, but all progress hath she called forth." These are the words of a libertarian, a very great one.

*Gideonse*: That's all I meant by the word "conservative"—conservative not in the sense of a Tory-like respect for *status quo*, but conservative in the sense of wanting to preserve the conditions in which a free society can continue to exist.

*Bryson*: It may possibly be, even though one can, in the light of modern development, say that the single tax is not as dominant or sovereign a remedy as he said, that the simplicity of it gave a force and a direction to his more profound desire to preserve liberty that he could not have provided with a more complicated or correct theory.

*Cherne*: I think that's true.

# CHARLES DICKENS

## Our Mutual Friend

CLIFTON FADIMAN • ALFRED KAZIN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: In many ways Dickens could be taken as the most typical of the authors whose books stood on our grandfather's bookshelf. The world is divided squarely into people who think Dickens was the greatest novelist who ever lived, and those who think, on the contrary, that Thackeray was the greatest novelist that ever lived. But Dickens seems to have a more precisely Victorian character; and this is remarkable from another standpoint, in that Dickens wasn't so much Victorian as he was so much himself. You can call everybody else Dickensian, but Dickens was Dickens. He didn't belong to any school.

*Fadiman*: No, indeed! He stood above all schools. I was interested to note that our announcer spoke of *Our Mutual Friend* as one of Dickens' finest works, Mr. Bryson. I suppose in a sense that's true. But in a larger sense it's equally true, as I think G. K. Chesterton once said, that there are no good Dickens books or bad Dickens books, but only one long, flowing length of Dickens, from which hunks are cut off, as it were. The length is called *Pickwick Papers*, or *Bleak House*, or, in this case, *Our Mutual Friend*. Nevertheless, I think we can say that *Our Mutual Friend* is about one particular thing, and perhaps we ought to start with that. *Our Mutual Friend* is a study of the suddenly enriched middle class and upper middle class in the middle part of the nineteenth century in England; and it is a scornful attack upon that class. The Vaneerings are probably the best examples of the characterization of the *nouveaux riches* in all fiction. This book, however, is really about money, rather than about specific people, about the effect of money on people from the highest level of society to the lowest. Perhaps that might be a starting point for our consideration of the book.

*Bryson*: It reflects the fact, doesn't it, Mr. Fadiman, that Dickens himself was a man who rose in society by his own efforts and was

a parvenu, if anybody ever was one, who knew the value of money and respectability.

*Kazin*: The book is indeed about money. It's also about people rising in society. All people, even the very, very poor people who work along the docks, are shown in their effort to move upward—the young Hexam, for example, and the young school teacher, Headstone, and the others. In that sense one of the great symbols of the book is not only the Thames, on which the book opens so unforgettably, but also the great dust pile in which and from which the old man made his money. The hold of the past really dominates the living all the time, and people are shown struggling against that past.

*Bryson*: And trying to rise above it.

*Kazin*: Trying to rise. We have the brand new Vaneerings, and the brand new tables; and we also have a kind of social mobility, if I may use that phrase, up and down the book.

*Bryson*: And, in the character of Headstone, whom you mentioned, Mr. Kazin, there is shown how desperate envy of other rising people might lead an otherwise pretty good man to crime, or suicide.

*Fadiman*: Yes, this book is about—and this is a phrase used constantly in the nineteenth century—the “passion for respectability.” And the word “passion” is just as important as the word “respectability.” Here are human beings distorted, frustrated, driven in some cases to crime, to bankruptcy and failure at the end because of the passion for rising in the social scale.

*Bryson*: That, of course, is the side of Dickens that one might call the social commentator. I wonder if the immense public which Dickens has—because, as everybody knows, he was one of the greatest popular entertainers—felt that that was what he was doing. I always thought of *Our Mutual Friend* as about as typical Dickens as you could get. The Dickens method reached its perfection here. It's the last novel he finished. He starts out with this wonderful chapter of the most violent melodrama; and the next chapter contains the most striking and satiric social criticism of the snobs. There he has launched his two weapons—melodrama and satire.

*Fadiman*: Yes, plus one other which I think we never should forget—comedy, high jinks, and the creation of purely odd characters who could, of course, be taken out of one of his books and put in any other.

*Kazin*: Well, Mr. Fadiman, wouldn't you say that Dickens is one of these men, who, though he comes from the poor, or respectable poor—his own father, Mr. Micawber, as we all know, had become a bankrupt—who reflects something which is new, really, in the England of this period—the pride of the man who has risen himself, risen not to be rich, though he did become rich, but risen to become the arbiter of everyone's conscience? Now, Dickens is one of the great masters of a new nineteenth-century world of journalism. One of the great delights of all Dickens, especially here, is the fact that Dickens can get off people so perfectly. He's so fascinated by the roar of brazen sound of the new rich or of the old poor that, in a way, the book relapses, if you like. Constantly it's a talk, it's a long mono-

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logue; and I think one reason for this is that Dickens wants to show the whole world, the whole of England. We get pretty impatient these days with those long, discursive stories with the very involved melodramatic plots. But the reason there are so many people in the book, and so many chapters, is that Dickens wanted to show everybody in England, every class, every force, working at the same time.

*Bryson*: Well, why, Mr. Kazin?

*Kazin*: I think it stems from the fact that for the first time a man like Dickens, or a man like Balzac in France, feels he belongs to no class, essentially, that he simply represents intelligence and his own creativity. You see, Dickens has all the pride of the man who has risen by his own gifts; and he has a scorn, a certain bombast, but mostly he has a terrific passion, almost ungovernable passion, for showing up everybody.

*Fadiman*: Well, isn't it also because Dickens had the poetical ability to identify himself with almost anybody he thought of?

*Bryson*: He identifies himself with Headstone, Mr. Fadiman, whose envy of the rich and whose desire to move forward into respectability leads to his own disastrous ruin.

*Fadiman*: Yes, one of the strange things about Dickens, as has been pointed out brilliantly by Edmund Wilson, is that he seems to have a great power of identifying himself with criminals and outcasts. There was in him a kind of unconscious attraction toward crime and toward violence. Some of his most remarkable characters are the ones who are most evil. Then, shortly after he's shown the crime in operation, he will produce one of his most sentimental scenes as if to expiate in himself this attraction to crime.

*Bryson*: Yes, and as if for fear he might be unjust to those who are rich or aristocratic, he occasionally presents a man of pure benevolence, not really a good man, but a man of pure benevolence, who's a kind of fairy godfather, and whose stroke wipes out for the moment all the evils in everybody.

*Fadiman*: Yes. John Harmon, the hero of the book, is such a fairy godfather; Mr. Boffin is such a one.

*Kazin*: But wouldn't you say that one of the reasons why Dickens gives us these sweet and charming old men, these little fairy godfathers, is that he can't look too long at the horror towards which he's driven by memories of his own poverty. As everybody knows, I suppose, the great event in Dickens' life was when he had to work for all those six months in a blacking factory, pasting labels on old bottles.

*Bryson*: As a boy!

*Kazin*: He never got this episode quite out of his mind, and if, as Mr. Fadiman says, he felt something of a criminal impulse, it's because of the bitterness of the protest. You see, Dickens was one of the founders of British Socialism. He was one of the great spirits behind the British Labor Party propaganda, though, actually, he was not a Socialist at all. He was a man who simply felt with all the passion of his nature a great bitterness against poverty and injustice *per se*. One of the most striking things in the book comes when he breaks out literally in his own voice—and the sound of the voice in

Dickens, of course, is important—to scream over and over again “My lords and gentlemen, honorable bores!” Over and over again Dickens directs his—not satire, it’s even stronger—bitterness against all the complacent people like the Podsnaps, for the Podsnaps believe that everything which is England is perfect and everyone who is admitted to their table must be good, too. There is one unforgettable scene in which he seems to be amazed that even the French don’t talk English.

*Fadiman*: The way in which Dickens, as Mr. Kazin says, breaks out of his proper role as detached observer and talks with passion and indignation to the reader is an example of the difference between Dickens and the modern novelist—who isn’t a detached observer. Dickens thought of himself as the conscience of England.

*Kazin*: Exactly!

*Fadiman*: Perhaps in part that is because religion was already becoming canting and hypocritical at that time. Dickens, I think, felt that he was the representative of morality. But that is not the way in which a modern novelist thinks of himself at all.

*Bryson*: I sometimes think, Mr. Fadiman, that some modern novelists think that they are the representatives of immorality.

*Kazin*: Well, yes, Andre Gide did; but then, Gide, who was so occupied with his own soul, wasn’t, I think, a very good novelist. The fact is that Dickens is perhaps the last, or, the first, shall we say, of those great novelists in the nineteenth century, like Dostoyevsky and like Tolstoy and like Trollope and like Thackeray, who didn’t write down to the audience. He didn’t feel that he was a self-conscious intellectual. I’m not blaming ourselves; our times are different. But the fact remains that Dickens’ audience is one that he could respect entirely. It wasn’t distorted by mass culture and by mass taste.

*Bryson*: That’s right, but it also was one which included all the people who today would be within the mass audiences, as we call it. Don’t you visualize a lot of people reading Dickens in exactly the same way now that they might follow a daytime serial on the radio—or a comic strip?

*Kazin*: I think that’s perfectly true. People read Dickens for all sorts of reasons. But Dickens’ chapters were much funnier than the comic strips, and they had almost as much melodrama.

*Fadiman*: Well, part of the richness of Dickens lies in the fact that at different times in your life you can read him on different levels. He has this melodramatic element in him and, on the other hand, a great deal of profundity (though never subtlety), and there’s a ladder, as it were, between those two extremes. This gives Dickens his peculiar “richness.”

*Bryson*: I wonder what the limits of that richness are, because everybody has read some Dickens, I suppose. He has been more universally read than any other author. I think it was Saintsbury who said that Dickens, in spite of his extraordinary creative power, never really moved on the higher levels of thought or dealt with the higher reaches of character. I wonder if that’s true.

*Fadiman*: On the higher levels of thought, I think that may be true; but most novelists don’t move on the higher levels of thought.

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Some modern novelists do, and often they are the most unsuccessful journalists. As for the higher reaches of character, I think Saintsbury is being a little snobbish there, as a good British Tory. What he meant, undoubtedly, was that Dickens was unable to portray . . . as so many people said, a gentleman.

*Bryson*: Of course, Saintsbury would hold that against him.

*Fadiman*: Well, maybe he wasn't able to portray a gentleman. That wasn't his business, and yet I think, in the case of Eugene Wrayburn, in *Our Mutual Friend*, we have the portrayal of a gentleman, a pathetic gentleman, a man of talent, a man of energy, a man with a brilliant intellect, who, because he has a small income, because he is idle, is self-defeated, as it were. He needs the love of a good woman.

*Bryson*: That's where the comment comes in on aristocracy. The aristocracy fails.

*Kazin*: Yes, Wrayburn, Mr. Fadiman, in that strange thing of Dickens, a man bored by himself. But before we show the defects of the other side of Dickens' richness, let's say one thing more about the richness itself, for we become so used to meagre rations in modern fiction and the so-called well-made story that we've forgotten that Dickens, before the daguerreotype and before photography, still believed with a completely free conscience that the task of a novelist was to portray life *per se*. I have a hunch that what defeats the modern novelist is that he begins with symbols, with meanings, with intentions. Now, Dickens, of course, is full of symbols and Edmund Wilson has shown so brilliantly that you can recreate Dickens' meanings with those symbols.

*Bryson*: You can also ignore them, Mr. Kazin.

*Kazin*: You certainly can. In fact, several generations have done so without any great loss.

*Fadiman*: Dickens wasn't conscious of the symbols, at least not conscious in the sense that many modern novelists are.

*Kazin*: No, he wasn't, but he used them again and again. They rose up in his mind unconsciously; and that's the only way symbols can arise. The only way symbols are meaningful is when they do arise that way. Take, for example, the symbols of the dust and the symbol of the Thames and the symbol of the locks in that wonderful macabre scene in which Headstone takes Riderhood to his death with him locked in the last embrace. Those symbols arise naturally because, I suppose always in England, the symbol and the actuality are much closer than we realize. For example, Twemlow—the pathetic little gentleman at the end who sums up all his courage to defend the marriage of Eugene Wrayburn to Miss Hexam—little Twemlow still wears knee breeches. Well, in England that's a sort of symbol. The knee breeches and powdered wig, thirty or forty years before, still had some meaning and one didn't have to twist one's mind or contort reality to see it. But I merely wanted to say that Dickens is still so close to life in abundance that he can describe people as a photographer would. And here I can't help thinking of that marvelous phrase about Mr. Podsnap when he first appeared. He said he had a "fatal freshness" on him. It's that sort of writing, that sort of

instinct of what people look like that is so characteristic. You remember, Chesterton once said that Dickens' whole effort was to change the expression of people's faces.

*Fadiman*: Another one was Podsnap's wife. The quickest bit of characterization I can think of at the moment is his phrase that she looked like a rocking horse.

*Bryson*: Of course, you are saying that, in a more modern self-conscious sense than he thought the symbols developed out of Dickens' characters and his plots. Whereas a modern novelist tends to think of a set of symbols and then search around in his imagination and his notes to see if he can't concoct some characters that will exemplify those symbols.

*Kazin*: That's right!

*Bryson*: The richness really comes in this capacity to see people more than anything else, even more than causes.

*Fadiman*: I think so. As a matter of fact, the people don't really grow in Dickens. What you get is a series of divine snapshots, wonderful flashes. It should be remembered that in reality, while some people grow, a great many people don't. One of the things that makes humanity so pathetic is that we are arrested and frozen at some point in our lives. In the case of the Vaneerings, for example, we see people who are incapable of anything except being continually brand new, fresh, *nouveau riche*. They have nothing else in them. And it's equally true of a man like Podsnap. Here is a man in whom self-complacency has become his whole character.

*Bryson*: Even embraces all of England.

*Fadiman*: It may be that the fact that Dickens' characters don't grow shows great insight into human life.

*Kazin*: Well, Mr. Fadiman, people either grow or they degenerate. No one stands still. What we're getting at here in Dickens is something else—his extraordinary social scorn. The people who simply remain frozen around the dinner table, lifting the same glass and saying the same phrases—the Vaneerings—really aren't people; they are caricatures. The real people in the book, Headstone, Lizzie Hexam, Eugene Wrayburn, and the others, do grow; and they grow either to their deaths or to some important crisis.

*Bryson*: And sometimes they change, Mr. Kazin. After all, Bella Wilfer does reform.

*Kazin*: That change is very unconvincing.

*Fadiman*: In the first half of the book, she's a rather malicious, materialistic, grasping minx. When she becomes an angel of light and mercy, you throw the book down in disgust. Dickens is now being dishonest, perhaps not knowing it. Dickens is always dishonest when he's being virtuous, and never dishonest, it seems to me, when he's not being virtuous.

*Bryson*: That's a surprising thing for you to say when you said a while ago, Mr. Fadiman, that he was the conscience of England.

*Fadiman*: All I meant was this, that when he is assailing evil he seems far more genuine than when he is characterizing good. His good characters, saintly characters, seem to us as we read them now

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to be papier-mache, but his attacks on people like the Vaneerings or the Podsnaps or the Wiggs are vivid, arrows in our flesh, barbed and memorable.

*Kazin*: Yes, they certainly are. Have we said anything about Headstone? He needs a word. Headstone loves Lizzie Hexam. He's the schoolmaster who has raised himself, too, and suddenly realizes that his passion for Lizzie and his insane jealousy of Eugene Wrayburn is based not only on sexual passion but also upon resentment of Eugene Wrayburn's social position.

*Bryson*: Wrayburn is really a gentleman!

*Kazin*: Wrayburn is really a gentleman, and Mr. Headstone is entirely self-made. This is terribly important in the book. To me the greatest scene in the book is when he makes his declaration to Lizzie Hexam, and she makes it clear that she doesn't want it, and he strikes his knuckles against the stone wall and makes them bleed. That is one of the scenes when you really see what I call the ungovernable passion in these people in England who have risen from the bottom of the ground. Now for the first time they appear in the full light of day, and they want to make themselves heard. In many ways that fist striking against the stone wall reminds one of the ending of one of Balzac's novels: the hero looks down on Paris and says "I will have that yet."

*Fadiman*: Well, I think that it's true that there's a great deal in common between Balzac and Dickens. But Balzac is to my mind much more the reporter and Dickens far more the poet, working on a much higher imaginative level than Balzac ever reached.

*Bryson*: You might start a good many arguments on that, Mr. Fadiman. But, whatever truth there might be in the comparison, one naturally thinks of it because so much of what goes on in comment is through the characters representing virtues and vices in both the novelists. And, of course, they are the greatest novelists in the world.

*Kazin*: Yes, I think more than the differences, we see the resemblances, both of them risen by their own gifts.

*Bryson*: And both were men whom a society suddenly had raised.

*Kazin*: Yes, both of them were terrifically passionate, energetic, fluent, endlessly inventive, men whose chief passion seems to be to create a world itself—in fact, to pack into it every human being they ever thought of or had seen in the world. That's why in many ways Balzac is Dickens' counterpart. Let's not forget for a moment that Dickens is also the great teacher of many modern novelists. The first and greatest of them, of course, is Dostoyevsky.

*Bryson*: And I suppose one can say that this passion for creativity was in Dickens more than it ever was in any other man.



# OSCAR WILDE

## *The Importance of Being Earnest*

JOHN MASON BROWN • LOUIS KRONENBERGER • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Oscar Wilde was, perhaps, a note of sophisticated scandal that gave a necessary lift to the somewhat drab and serious books that, otherwise, our grandfathers seemed to prefer. I don't know of any better way to bring Mr. Oscar Wilde into this discussion than to say that one of the lines in the play we are thinking about applies precisely. "It sounds," said Lady Bracknell, "as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They're always vulgar, and often convincing." This is typical Wilde and applies somewhat to arguing about him. Should one argue about Wilde, or just laugh at him?

*Brown:* The hope is not to be vulgar, but I should think the desire is not to be too convincing, except in the pleasure that lies in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. This play is, to my way of thinking at least, and I think to everybody's way of thinking, *the* great play of Wilde, the great farce-comedy in which he at last came into his own as a dramatist and a comic writer.

*Kronenberger:* I would think so. I don't think there's very much to argue about in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

*Bryson:* And yet, it's all argument, in a sense, isn't it?

*Kronenberger:* One is inclined to like it very much or not like it at all. I think there's a lot to argue about in the earlier plays, which are generally called comedies.

*Brown:* But, Mr. Kronenberger, don't you think that's one of the most interesting things about the beginning of Wilde's dramatic career, when he was writing the first plays, such as *An Ideal Husband*, *A Woman of No Importance* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*? As you say, these are plays that are ordinarily catalogued as comedies.

*Bryson:* Are they, Mr. Brown?

*Brown:* Of course not. What they really are is borrowed French clothing. He was taking over the most serious problem play

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parts from Augier and Dumas Fils—the woman who had had a past and stalked into her daughter's life. And his serious speeches are as appallingly bad, may I say, as if they'd been in *East Lynne*. But this is *East Lynne* redeemed at all points by Wilde's wit. And the reason you think of these plays as comedy is because, before the seriousness and after it, fortunately, blessedly, there happens to be the release of Wilde's own wit and his special epigram.

*Bryson*: Well, when he gets into his own then, Mr. Brown, when he starts writing *The Importance of Being Earnest*, what is the essential difference between that and these other plays, which are amusing but really bad? Is it because *The Importance of Being Earnest* is really not about anything?

*Brown*: When he has had the sense to stop being serious and when he is writing by his own confession, it is inspired nonsense.

*Kronenberger*: Well, he was forced to be a little serious in the beginning. There was absolutely no comic tradition left in England, except perhaps for Gilbert and Sullivan. Wilde found comedy a corpse and, I suppose, he didn't make it much better than a half-breed. It wasn't a time when one could be very frivolous about sex or very frivolous about society. Ibsen and Shaw were having trouble defending themselves being serious about it. I think that Wilde was afraid, really, to write drawing room comedy in which he would have been cynical, in which he would have been clever, in which he would have been taunting.

*Bryson*: Well what would you call this, Mr. Kronenberger? Farce?

*Kronenberger*: Oh, this is high farce. Don't you think so, Mr. Bryson?

*Bryson*: I would suppose so, but I think it's also very great comic writing.

*Kronenberger*: It's part farce and part comedy of manners. You might almost call it Gilbert and Sheridan.

*Bryson*: Is it funny?

*Kronenberger*: Very funny.

*Brown*: It seems to me that it is the greatest farce comedy in the language, because, of all farce comedies, even more than Sheridan's it seems to lift farce closest to what we usually call high comedy.

*Kronenberger*: It has a Savoy opera plot, full of the most insane improbability, acted out very seriously. But it does have a patina, it does have the polish of drawingroom comedy that you don't get in most sheer farce.

*Bryson*: In most farce, Mr. Kronenberger, don't you get explosive laughs just because of the surprise that the plot brings about? Now, here, you have that. I remember in the Gielgud performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest*—which was certainly a great experience in the theatre, with Gielgud and Pamela Brown and the rest of an excellent company—the entrance of Ernest in mourning for the death of a completely imaginary brother—or rather the entrance of Jack, who was Ernest in his other impersonation—is one of the things one never forgets. And yet, it doesn't seem to have that

explosive kind of experience that you get in, say, *Three Men on a Horse*.

*Kronenberger*: Well, it's a slow fuse. It grows on you. To me, his entrance, particularly when you know that the brother he's in mourning for is right there in the house, is theatrically one of the most vivid pieces of stage writing I've ever known.

*Brown*: The extraordinary thing is that the man who had worked on the earlier plays, rather unsuccessfully, as a stuffy contriver, borrowing these French plots with their big scenes and table thumping, had learned at least enough craftsmanship to really build what is, technically, a superbly managed farce. But the excitement comes not merely, as in *Three on a Horse*, from the physical complications, or even from the immediacy of the impact of the dialogue; it comes from the hard polish of the dialogue and the superb arrogance of a social class that dared to assume that it was the only class that mattered.

*Kronenberger*: It's wonderful arrogance, elegance, and almost solemnity. The great thing about the play is that the actors must know the importance of being earnest, it seems to me; that if they ever so much as give way with a single titter or smile, the play collapses into low farce.

*Brown*: Well, that was the glory, Mr. Kronenberger. Don't you think that Pamela Brown and Gielgud, in their performance over here, and certainly Edith Evans in London when she played Lady Bracknell, were as serious as we hope undertakers will be at the professional moment? Had they once laughed at themselves, or indicated that they were being funny, the whole joke would have collapsed.

*Kronenberger*: Oh, precisely. The elegance and arrogance have to stand out.

*Bryson*: And, of course, the elegance and arrogance is supported by characters like Lane, the footman, who is quite as witty as his master on his own level, and the little curate from the village, and Miss Prism, the nurse, whose misfortune lay in losing a novel and a baby at the same time—although the novel was hers and the baby wasn't.

*Brown*: I'm glad you made that clear.

*Bryson*: Her misfortune started the whole thing. Those characters are, somehow, as witty in their own way as the arrogant aristocrats. Yet that doesn't lend complete unreality to the play.

*Brown*: It only adds to the enjoyment. I think you have to remember that this is a comedy written in 1895, before Edwardian society had realized its insecurity in the Boer War, and before the confidence of empire had been shaken in any way. It's the most supremely arrogant farce-comedy that I know of.

*Kronenberger*: You know, it is very much the same as all Wilde's serious drawingroom melodramas. In other words, Miss Prism does turn out to have a kind of past, and Jack, who finds the importance of being Ernest, is a young man quite without a past.

*Bryson*: He hasn't even parents.

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*Kronenberger*: And instead of the plot turning on a fan or a brooch, as it does in Wilde's melodramas, it turns on a handbag that Jack was found in; it turns on parentage, and the hero lives quite as much a lie as the hero of *An Ideal Husband*.

*Bryson*: Mr. Kronenberger, I defy you to tell us in three sentences the plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

*Kronenberger*: I don't think I could. But I think that Wilde himself gives us a very good start, when the two young men are talking and one says: "You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose." And out of that comes, as good farce brings it along, the fact that one impersonates the imaginary brother, to the discomfiture of the other, that the two young ladies they are inevitably in love with both think they're engaged to a man named Ernest.

*Bryson*: And neither one of them is Ernest.

*Kronenberger*: Neither one of them is Ernest, although one turns out at the end to be Ernest.

*Brown*: It seems to me that is an admirable summary of the plot. But that is only the deck of the airplane-carrier. That has nothing to do with the flight of the planes.

*Bryson*: Of course. Now, how does he take off, Mr. Brown? What is this crepitation of wit you're talking about?

*Brown*: I beg your pardon?

*Bryson*: Crepitation.

*Brown*: I'll look it up, but thank you, sir. I live and learn! One of the wonders of the play is that it manages to hit exactly the right pitch in the first scene—the scene between Algernon and Lane, the butler—that kind of indifference of spirit. You remember the Congreveian definition of comedy? High comedy is the language of indifference. Here you have people who don't really care. They seem to sin—and that's one of the delusions of all Oscar Wilde's high comedies—and they are obviously people who may have memories of indiscretions or hope of future indiscretions, but sin is only one of their many pretenses.

*Kronenberger*: Sin has only a past in Wilde. It never has any future.

*Brown*: Or present.

*Bryson*: And that makes him a profound moralist, Mr. Kronenberger. If sin has no future in the world, what a world to look forward to!

*Kronenberger*: But sin must have a past; because, in drama, everything should have happened before the curtain goes up.

*Brown*: Let's go back to the first scene, Mr. Kronenberger, the one with Lane, the butler, before they come to the cucumber scene. Lane has been trying to tell his master about his family life, and Algernon says—and the stage direction importantly says "languidly," because that is the manner of the playing—"I don't know that I'm

much interested in your family life, Lane." And Lane says, "No, sir. It is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself." And it is the whole avoidance of the issue which is, of course, the beginning of the fun.

*Kronenberger*: Well, the cucumber sandwiches also takes us right into the heart of the thing, which is that it has no heart. The characters have no heart but they do have appetites, they do have stomachs.

*Bryson*: Yes, that's right. But, even in that scene you don't really take the appetite very seriously. It's only seldom in the play—and then, I think, with great art—that a kind of reality of these people protrudes itself.

*Brown*: Well, it would be fatal if the reality came in.

*Bryson*: That's right. But you get a suggestion of it and, to me, that deepens the wit. It shows you what Wilde is glossing over, so to speak.

*Brown*: But the complete truth is there. It's a sin to be serious about amusement and wit; but underneath all this there is a truth, a genuine social comment on a very special world that existed at a very special time.

*Kronenberger*: It's life in aspic, so to speak.

*Brown*: Absolutely!

*Kronenberger*: It's under glass.

*Brown*: And there is that vast difference, don't you think, Mr. Kronenberger, that distinguishes the subsequent English comedy of Maugham and Noel Coward. What you have in each of these three men is a picture of what happened to at least Mayfair society, that special part of England, from 1895 until the present time.

*Bryson*: I suppose, Mr. Brown, if you compare Maugham's *The Circle* with *The Importance of Being Earnest* you get completely over into this other world Mr. Kronenberger referred to, a world in which one doesn't hesitate to speak about sex; one makes it the basic joke of the whole business.

*Kronenberger*: I think in comedy you really must have criticism. But farce is almost fantasy, in which everything is played at a certain distance.

*Bryson*: But I want to know what is it that makes this play so remarkably surprising and delightful all the way through. Has Wilde any tricks?

*Brown*: Tricks? He has tricks that are so obvious that no one can copy them. Mr. Shaw's line when he reviewed *An Ideal Husband* indicates what I mean. *An Ideal Husband* had received, apparently, bad notices from the London critics, and Shaw said, "I gather that I'm the only person in London who cannot write like Oscar Wilde, myself." Everyone knew the trick, but no one could duplicate it. And the trick in the dialogue is a kind of epigrammatic Spoonerism. That is, you take the expected line and you say something else, like, "Her hair has grown gold from grief." In other words, you misplace the expected word. Or, you say, "Divorces are made in heaven."

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*Kronenberger*: Or, "Somebody is old enough to know worse."

*Bryson*: In other words, it's the absolute standing of sense on its head, and expectancy on its head. And out of that surprise comes the laugh. There's more to it than that.

*Kronenberger*: Well, there's usually a half-truth to it. There's never much more than a half-truth to the original.

*Bryson*: Well, to me, it's surprising not only that it works a little, but that it works almost all the way through. One finds himself laughing continuously; even though he knows perfectly well what Wilde is doing. That must be because the meaning is there.

*Kronenberger*: Also, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, at least, don't you think, Mr. Bryson, the play is awfully well done. Wilde had a very good theatre sense.

*Bryson*: You shouldn't ask *me* that, Mr. Kronenberger. Is it well done?

*Kronenberger*: It seems to me that he milks farce from every situation, every little twist and turn that he can get.

*Brown*: Don't forget that this farce is very pedigreed cattle. That is the whole purpose: the quality of the milk. What interests me is not only the aristocratic assumption, but the fact that Wilde, who, by every contemporary's testimony, was the greatest conversationalist in an age of great conversationalists, managed to remember all his better remarks. Instead of being all Irish, he must have had some Scotch blood. He was thrifty about his words.

*Bryson*: He wore long cuffs.

*Brown*: He wore long cuffs, even as they are worn in this day when men get their country address. But what he does is, having remembered his remarks, he gives you this barrage of dialogue, polished to the last degree, nonsensical in the most majestic and superb manner. And I think that is the fun of it.

*Kronenberger*: It seems to me that he milks farce from every cipient credit for. He gets credit and perhaps some abuse for his epigrams and his witticisms. But he was a wonderful writer of prattle. He was a wonderful writer of just chatter. Not so much here, because the plot takes over, but in his earlier plays, you suddenly get these interruptions, where a silly woman babbles on or somebody else talks about dinner parties. He has a really great gift for that, which comes out in the theatre much better than the epigrams.

*Brown*: The reason I think that's true is that the world of which he wrote and which he knew was a world in which there was birth, title, money, position—all that was assumed—and there was only one real employment, and that was conversation. That was the job at which they worked, that and indifference, pretending never to care.

*Kronenberger*: And the assurance made it possible to be impudent without seeming to be the least bit subversive. I mean, one could seem to knock the crowns and coronets off the high society world's heads without so much as moving a hair.

*Bryson*: It's because everybody thought they were nailed down, and they actually weren't. This was discovered later.

*Brown*: Certainly all three of us would agree that one of the

great things in the English theatre is the proposal scene. That is the scene between Jack and Lady Bracknell, that monster, that unfair monster, because she wasn't even a myth as described by Wilde, when the old lady, the titled English lady—and Wilde always wrote the same English lady, always the ultimate fortress of snobbism, arrogance and absurdity—asked for the conditions of marriage. Then, it seems to me, you come into one of the great scenes. I must say that it is tragic that we can't hear a record in which John Gielgud and Edith Evans play this scene. I personally believe that Wilde's comedy, like all better English comedy, can only be spoken by English throats. It takes that kind of onslaught with consonants, and it takes that kind of yawn in the tonsils, and it takes that kind of vocal arrogance, plus a kind of bite which we don't have.

*Bryson*: I don't doubt that's true, Mr. Brown. That makes it perfect on the stage. But when one reads it to himself, and he can't provide Edith Evans' consonants and John Gielgud's manner, it's still good.

*Kronenberger*: I think your Kentucky throat, Mr. Brown, is a great deal better than none.

*Brown*: I may sound more like Kate Smith reading Uncle Tom, but let me just approach at least two or three of the lines. This is when Lady Bracknell wants to know what Jack has to offer. And the first question is: "Do you smoke?"

*Jack*: "Well, yes, I must admit I smoke, Lady Bracknell."

*Lady Bracknell*: "I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?"

*Jack*: "Twenty-nine."

*Lady Bracknell*: "A very good age to be married at. I've always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?"

*Jack (after some hesitation)*: "I know nothing, Lady Bracknell."

*Lady Bracknell*: "I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate, exotic fruit; touch it, and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?" etc. etc.

Then you finally come to the question: what parents did he have? And the boy says he has neither a father nor a mother, "I've lost both my parents." And Lady Bracknell says, "Both? . . . That seems like carelessness. Who was your father?" and so forth and so on. Well,

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the whole touch, you see, is the offbeat of sense, pushed to delectable extremes.

*Kronenberger*: Lady Bracknell is really a great character and comes closest, I suppose, to being a caricature of a comedy of manners character. When Algernon, late in the play, has killed off his imaginary invalid friend and they asked him what happened, he said, "Well, the doctors found out that Bunbury couldn't live, so Bunbury died." And Lady Bracknell says, "He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians."

*Bryson*: Now there, of course, you get something which isn't quite a substitution of the unusual word. It's a different twist, but it's built upon the same surprise, isn't it?

*Kronenberger*: Well, that, I think, is real wit. That is hazing something.

*Bryson*: It is indeed. Now, does this stand up on the stage today?

*Kronenberger*: Well, I think Mr. Brown would probably agree with me that everything depends on the production. I have seen productions which seemed horrifying, because they were played for outright laughs; they were played for low farce. On the other hand, when John Gielgud came over and offered his production, with Pamela Brown playing Gwendolyn, it seemed to me one of the most delightful and one of the most civilized and one of the funniest (which is the most important thing) evenings I've ever spent in the theatre.

*Brown*: May I recall from that production one of the lines which I cannot resist; it should be read. One of the lines—and this is when you get beyond the reversal, the Spoonerisms, so to speak, where you elevate farce into wit, and where you have sense in the midst of nonsense—is where Jack's ward, Cecily, says, "Oh yes, Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows." That is beyond fooling. There is sense there.

*Kronenberger*: There also has to be tone, don't you think? There has to be the utmost elegance, high-handedness and hauteur.

*Brown*: Well, in the Gielgud production, Mr. Kronenberger, didn't you think that not only in the playing, but in Cecil Beaton's costumes and backgrounds you have this visual hauteur. You have the elegance of the John Sargent period portrait of the upper classes. And then what Beaton did was to push it beyond—puff the sleeve a little bigger, make the costume a little bit more exaggerated, the hat more and more of an aviary—and push it into this realm which was not life but was larger than life.

*Kronenberger*: That gives us an extension, rather than a distortion.

*Bryson*: How does that compare with Noel Coward, for instance, and Maugham—the people who write comedies for us today? These men have more freedom.

*Kronenberger*: Noel Coward, it seems to me, once, but perhaps only once, carries on the exact tradition in *Blithe Spirit*, which also acts out a fantasy.



WILDE, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

*Bryson*: Based on indifference, Mr. Kronenberger?

*Kronenberger*: Based on indifference. The point is that feeling must never really enter into this experience.

*Brown*: Well, the whole bloodless revolution of English sophisticated society is reflected in the difference not only of the characters, but in the background and the attitudes of the people who are Wilde's characters, Maugham's next, and finally Coward's. And what actually happens is that first you had people who belonged in Burke's Peerage, and then the person who had to be titled. Finally the title was assumed; somebody who entitled himself to a position by his work. The Wilde characters loathed being mentioned in a newspaper.

*Kronenberger*: Yes, you have the downfall of the drawingroom, really.

*Brown*: Certainly. And the Coward characters can hardly wait to read their notices.

*Bryson*: Yes. It's an entirely different thing, isn't it? And the fact that it is played now for the general public, rather than for the inner circle, I suppose, characterizes it as much as anything else. By "played" I mean that the farce of English society is now played for the newspapers and the general public; it used to be played only for the people who knew the secrets. Well, I don't think anything could be more fitting, if one is going to dismiss Wilde with a nod of respect, than to say that he always says exactly the opposite of what he means. The last line in the play is, "the Importance of Being Earnest."

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# JOHN STUART MILL

## On Liberty

ROBERT M. MACIVER • BERTRAND RUSSELL • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* One of the men whose works were on grandfather's bookshelf, where they were regarded with reverence—and, I suppose, occasionally read—was undoubtedly John Stuart Mill. And if grandfather were happy enough to have any liberalism, he probably based it on Mill. Mill has become a symbol for hard logic and thinking rather vigorously. I'm not sure that symbol is a valid one, except for one curious bright line of romance in his life—I'm not sure there's any humanity left in the man, but he must have been human once.

*Russell:* Oh, Mill was extremely human. In fact, his logic was constantly suffering. Mill was a great friend of both my parents. My father was a disciple of his; and he used to come to stay with them. For instance, he would read Shelley's *Ode to Liberty* aloud.

*Bryson:* He read it well, Mr. Russell?

*Russell:* He read it with too much emotion, and he'd shoot backwards and forwards while he was reading it. Finally, one time, he said, "It is almost too beautiful. I can read no more." He had immense emotion about it.

*MacIver:* Do you know a rhyme about John Stuart Mill, which brings out that point? It goes as follows:

John Stuart Mill,  
By an effort of will,  
Overcame his  
Natural bon-ami,  
And wrote *The Principles of*  
*Political Economy*.

*Russell:* Yes, that's a very good rhyme.

*Bryson:* Well, I should think the problem would be, Mr. MacIver, to decide whether or not he ever actually did overcome his "bon-ami," his almost sentimental nature, which appears to have been underneath this rigorous exterior. You suggested, Mr. Russell, that

he was not quite such a rigorous logician as he had the reputation of being.

*Russell*: No, I think he wasn't. The pretense of rigorous logic was due to his fear of his father. His father was a rigorous man and tried to bring up his son to be just the same sort of person. But in John the heart was always rebelling against the head. This began when he was an adolescent, and it went right on.

*Bryson*: But he did write a book on logic.

*Russell*: Oh, yes, but it isn't any good.

*Bryson*: Well, what about his book *On Liberty*? Is that any good?

*MacIver*: Oh, that was a very important book, not only when it was written, in 1859, but, at this very day, it's one of the most significant books in the field.

*Bryson*: You mean, Mr. MacIver, it's significant because it says things which are still true?

*MacIver*: It is. A great many things that Mill said could not be said better today. They are equally true today and always will be, in my judgment.

*Bryson*: Before we try to decide whether or not he arrived at these things on sound grounds, which may not make so much difference in the case of an advocate or a politician or statesman as it might in that of a philosopher, let's get at what he actually did say. What did he believe about liberty? It was a good thing, no doubt. But how far did he go?

*MacIver*: Well, Mill was not so much concerned with the interference of government by itself; but he thought in terms of our democratic system of things. He was about the first who thought that way in many affairs. So he's terribly afraid of the majority, not merely of a government. He's afraid of the censorship of the whole of the group over the individual.

*Bryson*: The main danger was that the majority of the people would keep down individuality.

*MacIver*: He thinks that the majority are adverse, when they get together that way, to individuality. And he says in this book, as his starting point, that everybody lives today under a hostile and dreaded censorship.

*Bryson*: This was about the time when people began to cease to fear government primarily as the enemy of liberty and began to fear their neighbors.

*Russell*: Well, I suppose that change was beginning then. The government was no longer *the* enemy that every decent person had to attack; it was no longer considered evil in itself. And then people like Mill woke up to the fact that, even so, it might have its evils, might have its dangers—which was a rather new idea to liberal-minded people.

*Bryson*: But the point that he raises, Mr. MacIver, in saying that the majority would interfere with freedom, is whether there is no limit upon what individuality is allowed to do. I mean, can one do as he pleases? After all, Mill didn't believe in simple anarchy.

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*Russell*: Oh, no. But he thought he could draw a clear line between the things that belonged to an individual and the things that belonged to a society. That's what he does in the first part of this book. He says he is going to lay down a clear principle: all things that belong to the individual should be sacred to him, and there should be no interference; all things that belong to society, society can make proper provision for.

*Bryson*: It sounds good.

*MacIver*: It sounds good if you can follow it up.

*Russell*: Well, the principle would be sound if it had any practical consequences. But the practical consequences that he reaches, he arrives at by fallacious reasoning, and because he meant to arrive at just those consequences.

*Bryson*: He had set them up, Mr. Russell, before he started to write?

*Russell*: Yes. His heart was governing his head, as always. I think myself that his conclusions are sound, and his principle is sound; but the conclusions do not follow from the principles.

*MacIver*: If, Mr. Russell, by 'conclusions' you mean his applications, I would not wholly agree. Some of his applications were a bit dubious. For example, there's this case of the sale of poisons. He admits freely that poisons can be used for murder, but he says, "Well, they're also used for perfectly useful purposes, so we must not interfere with their sale."

*Bryson*: But, Mr. MacIver, he does say that one should register his name when he buys a poison so that, if there's any temptation afterward to use it on human rats instead of four-legged ones, you can get caught at it. He does say that, doesn't he?

*MacIver*: He certainly does.

*Bryson*: But that's the only restriction he makes. You think he should have made more?

*MacIver*: I think there's certain danger if you don't make more in this particular case. There's the risk of damage, and he says that where there's a risk of damage there is a case for control.

*Russell*: Yes, I'm inclined to agree with you about poisons. And there, I don't think it follows from his own principle, because there's risk; and he says that where there's risk of damage to other people, you have a right to interfere.

*Bryson*: What about the case of the bridge—the unsafe bridge? He says, if there's a sign upon a bridge saying, "This bridge is not safe," and you see somebody, who is presumably in his right mind, walking out on it, you should keep still and do nothing.

*Russell*: I should certainly agree with that. If a man wants to walk over a bridge knowing that it's unsafe, let him do so. I can't see by what right you should stop the man if he wants to.

*Bryson*: Then you wouldn't interfere with a suicide.

*Russell*: I certainly should not. No.

*MacIver*: Now I'm not going to go against that, because I agree with you. At the same time, there is a principle that's involved. You say, I don't think in the one case it should be done—I think, in the

other case, there should be control. That's in the case of poison, not in the case of the unsafe bridge. But that's because your own particular discretion says here there is a risk of damage enough to support action, and here there isn't.

*Bryson*: That's the other side of the line, isn't it, Mr. MacIver? It is damage to others rather than damage to one's self.

*MacIver*: But it's a matter of who assesses whether there is damage or not. There's the rub.

*Russell*: As a matter of course if there were a lot of people under the bridge who would be killed if it fell, then I should certainly stop the man from walking over the unsafe bridge.

*Bryson*: But that's not his case, Mr. Russell. His point is that you don't interfere to keep the man from grave risk of killing or hurting himself, for his own sake. Well, is it possible to redraw the principle? Mr. MacIver says that there is no clear field where it affects only the one person, and no clear field where it affects only society at large. In the first case you don't interfere no matter if the person is going to damage himself, in the second you do if there is going to be damage to others. Now, you say that line can't be drawn. Can that principle be restated so that it's sounder?

*Russell*: Yes, I think you can restate in this way: that any prohibition must be justified not on the ground of preserving the man himself from harm, but of preserving other people from harm. That is the only justification for prohibitions. Of course, it's often very difficult to draw the line, but that is a characteristic of all decision. There's nothing peculiar in that.

*Bryson*: You think that it's impossible to make these things rigid in any case?

*Russell*: You can't make anything rigid. In every imaginable thing, there's a margin of doubt. There is always a marginal case of which you can't say whether it belongs on this side or on that. That is always so.

*MacIver*: Of course, Mill himself admits that very principle, Mr. Russell.

*Russell*: Yes.

*MacIver*: At the very beginning of his essay he says: "The only reason for which mankind is justified to interfere with the liberty of any man is self-protection"—that is, the protection of society, never to save the man from himself. Now you can accept that principle but—in Mill's treatment there was always a tendency to think of man as being rather insulated in his relation to society.

*Bryson*: Not only that, Mr. MacIver, wasn't there also in Mill's case a failure to be a prophet (as might be expected) and realize the extent to which the danger that one is subject to in ordinary living would be vastly increased by technological changes? All kinds of things are dangerous now that didn't exist in Mill's time. Let me add a case which he might have used if he had been writing in this year—letting a person drive an automobile when he's drunk.

*Russell*: Well, that is quite clear—you mustn't let a man drive an automobile when he's drunk. But you shouldn't interfere with his

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getting drunk in his own home if he wants to, because that's his own affair.

*Bryson*: But then one gets into this very wide band of uncertainty, Mr. Russell, when he realizes that there are many people who aren't very good drivers when they're sober, and it's very difficult to tell whether they're going to have an accident in advance.

*Russell*: Oh, yes. You have a perfect right, before you give a man a license to drive, to make out that he can drive, and that surely is done.

*Bryson*: It's done, yes. But we still kill forty or fifty thousand people a year on the highways.

*MacIver*: You know, I'm still afraid that, if we accept the principle that anything can be interfered with if there's a risk of damage, we might get into situations that many of us would dislike.

*Bryson*: Put it in another field, Mr. MacIver. In the second half of his book, Mill more or less makes a jump and goes into the risk that there is in saying something which may not be true. How about dangerous thoughts?

*MacIver*: Ah, but there is a very different argument there, and, I think, a much better one. In that part Mill is giving substantial grounds for men being free to think as they please, to have their own opinions and their own creeds on everything. And he does that in terms of a distinction of what makes truth, and how truth is advancing society. Where do we learn things? How do we learn? If you censor, you're preventing truth from expressing itself. Even, he says—and I think this is a very important statement—even truth itself, if it is controlled by authority and by coercion, becomes superstition.

*Russell*: I agree entirely with that. And I think it's very important to realize that the arguments for free speech and free thought do not depend upon this principle of Mill's—because what you think and what you say does affect others and yourself and, therefore, would be ruled out from the sphere of liberty if one took his principle as the sole basis for liberty.

*Bryson*: His first principle doesn't run in the second area. Well, let me approach it in another way. One hears now, in the rather excited state of American public opinion—and it may be true in your country also, Lord Russell—that a person should not be allowed to speak lies, that lies are a damage to society and nobody should be allowed to speak lies. Now Mill would say that anybody should be allowed to say whatever he thinks he wants to say. He doesn't even discuss good faith.

*Russell*: I think you may perhaps maintain that everybody should be allowed to say what he likes but, if so, you should supplement it by saying that, when it's damaging to some individual, that individual must have a right to equal publicity in reply.

*Bryson*: Yes. That begins to divide our field into two kinds of dangerous thoughts, doesn't it? When you say something which is not true about a person and is damaging to the person, that requires some kind of rebuttal for the person.

*Russell*: Yes.

*Bryson*: But suppose somebody should get up in your country, or in this one, and say he believes that the kind of government we have is a bad government, we ought to have another. In the present temper of society, that person would be drastically interfered with. Mill would object, wouldn't he?

*Russell*: Yes. He would object to it very profoundly. I think everybody should have the right at any moment to argue that the government of his own country might be improved. And if you don't say that, it means that you impose upon your country whatever evils your government happens to have at the moment.

*MacIver*: I am heartily in accord with that. I'd say that, not only should you be able to say, if you want to, that the government could be improved; you should be able to say that the government is rotten through and through, and nobody ought to interfere with you.

*Bryson*: Even that we should have another kind of government?

*MacIver*: Altogether. You can say all that, and I'll think you're still within the reasonable bounds of liberty.

*Bryson*: But Mill didn't assert that only on the basis of his first principle, which you two gentlemen are inclined to question. He gives other reasons for saying that one should not suppress any opinion. And they're pretty good reasons.

*MacIver*: He gives what I think are really substantial reasons, which have little to do with any particular logical system at all. He thinks about the whole creativeness of men—the things that make men spontaneous, the things out of which growth occurs—and he says, if you cut down these freedoms in the area of thought and discussion, you are curbing all that makes for newness in life, and for vigor, for freshness in society.

*Russell*: All that I quite agree with. But, of course, a new thing has arisen since Mill's time—one which he didn't consider at all. That is the fact that an opinion held by the rich and powerful has a much better chance of succeeding as propaganda than one which is held by the poor and powerless. Therefore, if you have free competition among opinions, it is not the excellence of the opinion that gives it victory but the power of those who hold it.

*MacIver*: I agree that there is always a certain handicap on the part of the weak against the strong. But isn't it remarkable that so many times the opinion held by the weak has triumphed over the opinion of the strong. Isn't that true even in this matter of politics or government, as well as in other affairs?

*Russell*: Well, I think that's true only where the government has been rather incompetent. But if you have a strong, competent government, it can pretty well make sure of having its opinions adopted.

*MacIver*: I don't quite agree. I'm thinking how often I've known cases where elections went against a party that had all the powerful organs and in favor of a party that had very less influential periodicals and newspapers on its side.

*Russell*: That is quite true.

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*MacIver*: In this country and in others that has happened.

*Bryson*: Of course, that can happen. Nevertheless, the danger to the creativeness of freedom, which Mr. Russell speaks of, is still there.

*MacIver*: Oh, I admit the danger. But I do not see any way of dealing with it. And I say it is a danger that is limited because somehow or other—it's curious how—an opinion carries weight if it appeals to people. And they'll get to know it in time unless, of course, they are living under a monopoly in a dictatorship.

*Bryson*: When you look at Mill's arguments, when he says that the new opinion, which is being suppressed, may be true, and it would be a pity to suppress the truth, I think most people who are uneasy now about free speech would agree. But, when he comes to his second point and says that one's own possession of the truth is far stronger if he has been compelled to defend it against error, a lot of people now would say that is not so. I'm not one of those people—don't misunderstand me, I agree with Mill. But a lot of people would say: "That isn't true; there are many weak people, there are many people who are easily confused; and, if you permit lies to fly abroad in the world, these people are going to be taken in, and pretty soon you will have a situation you can't deal with." Now Mill would say that's a risk we have to run, wouldn't he?

*MacIver*: Oh yes! I don't believe he'd take such a risk very seriously at any time.

*Bryson*: He'd think it wouldn't be much of a risk?

*MacIver*: I don't think he'd consider it much of a risk at all.

*Bryson*: But isn't most of the suppression of free speech at the present time based upon that kind of argument?

*Russell*: It is, and, I think, entirely wrongly. Take education for instance. Most educational authorities hold that there are certain opinions that their pupils must not be allowed to hear.

*Bryson*: Not to hear at all.

*Russell*: Not to hear at all. Because they think their pupils are grossly stupid. They think the advocates of what they consider error are extremely clever, and that, if the pupils hear these advocates of error, they will be convinced of error. That is a position of dogmatism which I think is utterly intolerable.

*Bryson*: You sound almost like Mill himself, Mr. Russell. Here is one statement out of Mill, which is typical of Mill's way of thinking, but I wonder if it isn't a little optimistic, in the light of some things that are happening. Mill says: "If civilization has got the better of barbarism when barbarism had the world to itself, it is too much to profess to be afraid lest barbarism, after having been fairly got under, should revive and conquer civilization. A civilization that can thus succumb to its vanquished enemy must first to become so degenerate that neither its appointed priests and teachers, nor anybody else who has the capacity, will take the trouble to stand up for it. If this be so, the sooner it receives notice to quit, the better." That sounds to me a bit over-confident about what civilization can do. After all, civilizations have gone down.

*Russell*: Yes. What is, I think, so very much over-confidence is



the idea that barbarism has been vanquished. After all, even in the most civilized countries there are a great many barbarians, and very often they get hold of the government.

*MacIver*: Of course he says it's only when what he calls civilization becomes degenerated that that happens. If you take that with a certain latitude, perhaps he wasn't quite so optimistic after all.

*Bryson*: But isn't civilization always a battle inside a nation as well as between nations? You have to fight for civilization wherever you find it in danger. But Mill's optimism appears, even from your point of view, Mr. Russell, a bit over-confident, a bit excessive. What was there in Mill's character that made him grasp with so much fervor and state with so much eloquence ideas which have lasted for a hundred years—even though he couldn't arrive at them by logic.

*Russell*: Well, I think they were the ideas that our time needs; but our time doesn't desire them as much as his time did. I think they're still needed and still very good.

*MacIver*: When he spoke about civilizations becoming degenerate, I think he felt that one way to prevent degeneration was simply this way of allowing all opinions free scope. In this arena of opinion you have fresh air that, more than anything else, can keep civilization from degenerating, because it degenerates in the mind not in the body.

*Russell*: Yes. Here again he was too optimistic. He thought that discussion would lead people to the more reasonable opinion. I think that, with the development of modern propaganda methods, this is no longer true.

*Bryson*: You mean it's no longer true, unless discussion can be made to persist in spite of propaganda.

*Russell*: Oh, yes.

*Bryson*: It's still possible, isn't it?

*Russell*: It's possible—but only if you control propaganda in ways which, I think, his own principles of liberty would make impossible.

*Bryson*: So you think that we have developed a situation in which, although his principles are sound, they'd be extraordinarily difficult to realize.

*Russell*: Very difficult, considering the power of modern propaganda, yes.

*MacIver*: I'm not so afraid of propaganda where everybody's free and where there's no suppression of anyone's opinion. I'd be willing to take a chance there.

*Bryson*: You really are pretty well convinced that Mill had the right idea?

*MacIver*: Oh, definitely.

*Bryson*: Even though you don't think his arguments will all stand up? Well, I find in reading the book that what gave me almost a feeling of inspiration was the eloquence and force of his statement of the value of difference, the value to civilization of spontaneity and freedom, the value of the creative power that lies in difference and the chance for very man to be himself. That is there, even though the arguments may not stand up.

# HENRY JAMES

## *The Ambassadors*

JAMES THURBER • MARK VAN DOREN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* If anyone's grandfather had a copy of *The Ambassadors* on his bookshelf, I suspect he was a very unusual grandfather and a very unusual man, because James was talked about in the higher circles of criticism and thought, almost never bought, and I presume very little read when this book came out in 1903. James is one of those people whose after-reputation so much outstrips what he had in his lifetime.

*Van Doren:* Well, the reader of the manuscript of the book for Harper & Brothers, in 1903—the reader was H. M. Alden, who, by the way, was a professor at the University of Illinois when I was there—wrote this unfavorable report. Mr. Thurber brought it this morning; wouldn't you like to hear it, Mr. Bryson? He said: "The scenario is interesting, but it does not promise a popular novel. The tissues of it are too subtly fine for general appreciation. It is subjective," and comprises a "complex mental web in which the reader is lost if his much wearied attention falters. A good proportion of the characters are American, but the scene is chiefly in Paris. The story in its mere plot centers about an American youth in Paris, who's been captivated by a charming French woman separated from her husband; and the critical situations are developed in connection with the efforts of his friends and relatives to rescue him. The moral in the end is that he is better off in this captivity than in the conditions to which his friends would restore him. I do not advise acceptance. We ought to do better." And the publishers did not publish the novel.

*Bryson:* As a matter of fact, Mr. Van Doren, that's a pretty fair summary of the book, isn't it?

*Thurber:* I don't think it is.

*Bryson:* No? Mr. Thurber, why not?

*Thurber:* Well, in the first place, while it's true about the subjectivity and the subtle tissues of his writing, it is not true, certainly, that Chad Newsome is captivated. He is, to use Henry James' phrase,

"saved," which is quite different. Furthermore, there's no mention here of the hero of the book, Lambert Strether. It's a story of Lambert Strether.

*Bryson:* He is, after all, the first ambassador, isn't he?

*Thurber:* He's the first ambassador and the first character of the book, really.

*Van Doren:* Well, Strether is included in the reference to the friends and relatives who try to rescue Chad.

*Thurber:* Yes, but that's not saying enough.

*Van Doren:* Of course it isn't!

*Bryson:* Well, did Alden, do you think, miss the point that the real drama of the book—and it is a dramatic book, in spite of its fineness of tissue and subtlety of issue—lies in this moral decision that Strether has to make as to whether or not he will advise his young American friend to go back to what are not really very bad conditions—they are merely prosperity, and a marriage with a beautiful girl, and a lot of money in Massachusetts—rather than stay in Paris with this woman who has done so much to make a man-of-the-world of him. The book is about this moral problem that Strether has to solve. The book is all written from Strether's standpoint. Alden doesn't seem to capture that particular element in the story.

*Thurber:* I don't think he was interested in such a thing, Mr. Bryson. Henry James, in the twenty-thousand-word outline, to which Alden is referring—James did not submit to Alden, or to Harpers, the completed manuscript running to, I think, a hundred and thirty-five or a hundred and fifty thousand words, much longer than most James novels—in this outline, James said that this was a story of the monumental period of self-realization of our poor fermenting hero. There is not only this moral decision, which is also based on esthetic value; there is a study of a man who, up to fifty-five, had led a very cold, bleak existence and suddenly, in the warmth of Paris and in the charm of one woman, comes into the realization that, while he's fifty-five, he still has a chance for the beauty of living, the beauty of human experience.

*Bryson:* And, yet, Mr. Thurber, he renounces all that in order to give his young friend the right advice, because, if he tells Chad, the American boy, to drop Madame Vionnet, his French friend, and go back to America, Strether himself gets a wealthy marriage, a future, and so on, because the boy's mother is the person who's going to decide those things for him. But he goes against the mother's obvious wishes, and sacrifices his own career for beauty—but not for his own chance at life, for Chad's chance at life.

*Thurber:* Yes, it can be interpreted that way. But, subjectively, Strether is a man who does the saving, a man whose final word sets free a spirit, who has also saved himself. There are several underlying levels here, as in all James books, and this man Alden found it tedious to read, apparently. But it isn't tedious, I think, if you are on all three or four levels of appreciation when reading it. But for that, I admit, you have to be a Henry James man. I happen to be one, and

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this is one of my favorite books. I have read it four times in the last thirty-five years.

*Van Doren*: By the way, I want to correct an injustice I did to Harper & Brothers. I have an early edition of the book here and I see that it's copyrighted by Harper & Brothers in 1902 and 1903, so that they did publish it against the advice of Mr. Alden.

*Thurber*: Well, Alden wrote that memorandum of his to the editors of *Harpers* magazine. This was a question of serialization.

*Van Doren*: I see!

*Bryson*: Harpers did publish the book, and the popular reprint, which I have here in my hand, is also published by Harpers and probably, I would think, has outsold many times the original book.

*Van Doren*: I'm very much interested, Mr. Bryson, in Mr. Alden's prophecy that it would not be a popular novel.

*Bryson*: Well, it wasn't!

*Van Doren*: Of course it wasn't, and, in a sense, it isn't now and, I suppose, never will be in the degree to which some novels have been popular.

*Bryson*: Why not, Mr. Van Doren?

*Van Doren*: I don't know exactly why, but I'm terribly interested in the question. I agree with everything that Mr. Thurber can say about the subtlety and delicacy of the material here and of the superiority of this novel over almost any other novel you could mention of its time, or perhaps any time. James is clearly superior; as a matter of fact, he's superb. But there is probably some explanation for the fact that he cannot be in some rich and deep sense popular, and my guess would be something like this: the stuff he handles, the fine stuff, is not really rooted in commoner and more familiar things, with a plot which is substantial and with people who are substantial. Maybe they are substantial, but a writer like Shakespeare, who has everything—and maybe it isn't fair to anyone to compare him with Shakespeare, but I will in this case—is just as subtle as James, and he is just as common as dirt, too. That's a marvelous combination that almost no one ever achieves. In the case of James, I think the large body of readers find only that top, superbly handled subtlety; but there is not enough beneath it, perhaps, so that you have nothing but subtlety. Subtlety isn't enough in itself.

*Thurber*: I agree with that. It seems to me that one of the great achievements of the man we are talking about, Henry James—and I say this as a writer in the tiny corner of the world of literature—is that he could write so well about good people. All these people are good; and it's awfully hard to do good people. Many American writers haven't been able to do it, so we have blood and thunder and the stealing of the best friend's wife and all that sort of thing. Henry James deals with the subjective, the fine sensitivities and sensibilities of intelligent, good people—a very difficult thing to do, indeed. His friend, Joseph Conrad, said that he was a historian of fine consciences. That's hard to be.

*Van Doren*: Of course it is, and I have the greatest admiration for him. I don't want to keep talking about Shakespeare (I do that

all the time, anyway), but I couldn't help being impressed by a statement made by a colleague of mine at Columbia that he has found a certain affinity between this novel and that play of Shakespeare which we know as *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cleopatra, in Egypt, is curiously unsensuous—insofar as she is represented on the stage she isn't the sultry person that most people think she's going to be—she's all wit and all temperament and all . . .

*Bryson*: All infinite variety.

*Van Doren*: From the point of view of the Romans, who correspond to the Americans in this novel, she is probably an evil person. But when we see her, and when we hear other people talk about her, she is infinitely fascinating and somehow good. Even the priests bless her.

*Bryson*: Exactly the way Madame Vionnet is in this book.

*Van Doren*: You don't see Madame Vionnet doing anything; you don't really hear her saying anything. But we see Cleopatra being angry; we see her making up quarrels; we see her walking the streets of Alexandria, making fun of all the people with Antony. We can believe her as a person up and down, from the very top to her very toe, desirable.

*Thurber*: All right! But I think you can believe Madame Vionnet. Of course, the action goes on inside, and you don't see that.

*Bryson*: Except when emotion breaks through.

*Thurber*: Oh, yes!

*Bryson*: There's a very touching scene when she breaks down and cries, talking to Strether.

*Thurber*: That's what James called the beautiful morsel of the book.

*Bryson*: Yes!

*Thurber*: The man who first introduced me to Henry James, the late Professor Joseph Russell Taylor, of Ohio State, a good university in those days, said that in this woman, Henry James has created a woman of great charm, whose activity in the novel is charm, and charm is a very hard thing to have, or to write about. At one point he says, after Lambert Strether has come out for the young lovers—and even though he later finds they are living in sin, he is still for them—he has this line that Professor Taylor used to print and that I've often used in stories: "When she touches a thing, the ugliness, God knows how, goes out of it." Taylor used to say that that is as fine a definition of charm in a woman as has been written.

*Bryson*: There's a technical point here. Some people think that James wasted this enormous technical equipment of his on material that didn't have enough substance. I wouldn't agree. I think James himself was quite right when he said it isn't what happens to people, it's what they think about what happens to people, and what they think is happening to them, that makes literature.

*Van Doren*: And the difference it makes to them.

*Bryson*: That's right! That's the real thing. Shakespeare, I think—going back to your fulcrum, Mr. Van Doren—has to put in, for the groundlings, a good deal of the violence he didn't particularly

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care for; he had to do that to hold his theatre. But James doesn't have to; he's writing for a select audience. But James does this very subtly. He gives you Madame Vionnet and Madame Vionnet's effect on this American boy in turning him from a crude American student, who's a kind of ne'er-do-well, a loose liver around Paris, into the most finished and charming, poised man-of-the-world. Before you ever see Madame Vionnet, you see in Strether's experience of the boy, his observation of the boy, what has happened. That makes you know that this woman must be something; so the real problem for James, after he brings Madame Vionnet on the scene is not to let her do anything that will disturb the conviction you've already got that she's something very wonderful.

*Thurber*: Well, let me say this one thing. The papers recently, since the World Series—this is certainly not my observation; I'm quoting various sports writers, although they didn't draw this comparison because they don't read *The Ambassadors*—have said the thing that happened to Chad Newsome happened to "Lippy" Leo Durocher, who was saved by a woman named Laraine Day, his beautiful and charming wife. This has all been printed in the papers: that the new Durocher, the man who was coarse, who said of Mel Ott, the great right-fielder and manager of the Giants, "Aw, nice guys finish last!" now announces, "All my boys are champions. They are all wonderful. I wish no credit of my own." Not quite as stuffy as Chad Newsome, but James is touching a common thing.

*Bryson*: Of course, he was!

*Thurber*: And he did it in an uncommon way. Now, just one more minute on the question of his popularity. Certainly, the material that he used, his characters and his plots were popular. They became popular in other people's hands. Twenty years ago, John Balderston took his unfinished novel, *The Sense of the Past*, and made "Berkeley Square" out of it, which starred Leslie Howard. We all know what "The Heiress" is. It is a dramatization of Henry James' novel, *Washington Square*. *The Osborne Papers* has been successfully done in the movies. "The Innocents" is his great, long story of *The Turn of the Screw*, and the CBS network's very fine "Studio One" has twice done *The Ambassadors* in an hour-long television show; and it was done on another network in radio for an hour's performance.

*Bryson*: So somebody else did take one of his stories and make viable drama out of it—although he tried all his life to get into the theatre and never could.

*Thurber*: He never could. He said of the theatre that it is the perfect, the beautiful form; but he couldn't make it.

*Van Doren*: He probably was too much interested in something that we should admire him for being interested in, and I do, because I do admire him very greatly. He was interested in the effects of experience, as you say, Mr. Bryson, on the persons who have them, and on others, too. You pointed out one of the triumphs of this book, namely, the rendering of Madame Vionnet's serious effect on Chad. But there is also her failure to affect Waymarsh, this American who

is, I suppose, Strether's contemporary. He is about the same age; he's in Paris, too; and the things that happen to Strether don't happen to him, although both men are in the same city, and see the same people. Waymarsh sees Madame Vionnet and is utterly unaffected by her.

*Bryson*: But he doesn't hate her, the way the women do.

*Van Doren*: Oh, no, he doesn't hate her.

*Bryson*: Chad's sister, for instance, not the girl from America Chad is supposed to marry, but Chad's sister, really behaves quite badly about Madame Vionnet. She doesn't really even give her a chance.

*Thurber*: You mean Sarah?

*Bryson*: Yes! She doesn't even give her a chance. She just condemns her out of hand.

*Van Doren*: But Sarah's husband, Jim, in Paris, is still a third sort of ambassador. He comes over and he just goes off on a bat, doesn't he? He just enjoys Paris.

*Bryson*: Yes, in a very innocent and sweet way.

*Van Doren*: Yes, but in a perfectly simple-minded way.

*Bryson*: By "innocent and sweet" I don't mean that his behavior was innocent and sweet. But his complete, relaxed acceptance of the fact that Paris is a place where you have a good time is very charming.

*Van Doren*: And he mistakenly supposes that all that Chad has been doing over here has been having this kind of good time, too.

*Bryson*: Completely missing the point.

*Van Doren*: Something, you don't quite know what it is, has happened to Chad, but you're perfectly willing to believe that he has become a very distinguished young man.

*Thurber*: Well, I know what happened to you. It's Housman's "When I was in love with you, I was clean and brave."

*Van Doren*: On the other hand, don't you think that, in addition to all that, Chad had come in contact with an immeasurably ancient culture that expresses itself in Madame Vionnet, something which has richness and yet restraint?

*Thurber*: That's right!

*Bryson*: That's right, and yet we mustn't read a happy ending into this, Mr. Van Doren, because, at the end, James gives you the idea that Chad is going eventually to desert Madame Vionnet and go back and be a good American businessman, and Strether makes his decision to advise him to stay as long as he will.

*Thurber*: Some people, by the way, Mr. Bryson, think that Chad did go back.

*Bryson*: Well, at least he could!

*Thurber*: Yes!

*Bryson*: He could have! That's no happy ending. You have no assurance whatever that Chad and Madame Vionnet are going to go on indefinitely being happy.

*Van Doren*: By the way, were either of you sorry that Strether

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didn't somehow or other accept this Miss Maria Gustrey, who, in effect, offered herself to him?

*Thurber*: In some ways, yes, because I would have grabbed her! I don't believe in going back to the coldness of that existence in Massachusetts that he pictures and the woman there, Chad's mother, fifty-one, very neurotic and very strange.

*Van Doren*: And why not?

*Thurber*: Look who did do that, in Sinclair Lewis' *Dodsworth*. Now, it's perhaps harder to believe that Dodsworth, an American businessman, stayed with this lovely woman in Italy than Strether would come back. Strether, being Strether, a man of high sensitivity, of fine, esthetic, and moral values, and ethical, of all things, would come back. Henry James was that kind of man and he could not possibly let this guy lock the door on that woman.

*Van Doren*: Well, remember, Mr. Thurber, Strether comes as near as he does anywhere to stating his own virtue when he says, very modestly: The reason I have to go back is because I can't get anything out of this. . . .

*Bryson*: Precisely!

*Van Doren*: . . . I have to be the one person who doesn't win anything.

*Bryson*: Yes! He can't make this decision to tell Chad to stay and get the best of Paris as long as he will and by that gain for himself the advantage of having Maria Gostrey. He can't get any advantage out of it at all; and he must take the loss of Mrs. Newsome as his prospective bride, of the fortune that that would give him, and the career that that would give him. He's got to throw it all down the drain in order to make his decision on behalf of Chad, completely without benefit to himself.

*Van Doren*: Yes, and then there's that marvelous suggestion that he could have stayed in Paris without, of course, Mrs. Newsome's money, could have stayed in Paris and been somehow supported by Madame Vionnet and Chad, and he doesn't even bluntly refuse that. We just know that he probably won't.

*Bryson*: No, he won't. But there's something else involved here, Mr. Van Doren, which neither you nor Mr. Thurber have said anything about. One of the reasons why these ideas, which are, in themselves, very fascinating ideas and could have a quite wide interest, are more or less impermeable to lots of readers, is Mr. James' famous style. Some of his contemporaries had something to say about that.

*Thurber*: Yes, I don't suppose that any writer has had a style more criticized and kidded. I remember somebody has said—it's a famous line about him—that he "abominates in a vacuum." But a defender of his once said, "Everybody is jumping on Henry James as they would jump on a cat for not being a dog."

*Van Doren*: Very good!

*Bryson*: Well, a cat reminds you, I think, of what H. G. Wells said about James.

*Thurber*: Yes, Wells was one of his most severe critics.

*Bryson*: I've got it right here, Mr. Thurber.



*Thurber*: I'd like to hear it.

*Bryson*: He says the characters are of an "elaborate and copious emptiness." And then comes this sentence, which is pretty wonderful: "The thing his novel is about is always there. It is like a church, lit, but without a congregation to distract you, with every light and line focused on the high altar, and on the altar, very reverently placed, intensely there, is a dead kitten, an eggshell, a bit of string." That's a perfect satire on James.

*Van Doren*: Well, it isn't true.

*Bryson*: Of course, it isn't true, but it's a perfect satire.

*Thurber*: Well, "intensely there" is, of course, one of the finest two words, ever written. "Intensely there" is right, in his purposes and everything else. For instance, there is just one line that he wrote in his notes for *The Sense of the Past*. "Oh, oh, oh," he dictated to his secretary, "I see so much here," or something like that. I think it is interesting that this book got its start through one or two sentences spoken by William Dean Howells fifty years ago to a man named John Sturges, a mutual friend of Howells and James. Sturges had said to James at dinner one night: "Howells said to me the other day, he's getting old, and told me I'm younger, and he said don't miss the experience, don't miss your life. If you haven't had your life, what have you had?" And that is what Henry James is writing about. It's the story of this man Strether, middle-aged, fifty-five, the editor of a small and not very important literary review, and the secretary of what you might call a dignified, sinking-fund-type man. It's a happy story because, at fifty-five, he still has his great period of self-realization, of doing wonderful things for these people, of saving them. That's wonderful. Henry James' people don't need physical possession of a lady, not at fifty-five they don't.

*Bryson*: What they need is a chance to make a great moral decision and know that they're doing it.

*Thurber*: It's a triumph. James says in his notes and in his outline that the final departure from Gostrey will be amusing as well as touching, and it is amusing.

*Bryson*: Nevertheless, it's giving something up.

*Van Doren*: Yes! Maria Gostrey is given up. I couldn't help feeling sorry both for her and for Strether, who gave her up—although I wasn't at all sure that she didn't care more for him than he was able to care for her.

*Bryson*: Well, the fact that one has to dig at this book, even in talking about it, shows, I think, not only that it is not surprising that many people haven't been willing to make the effort, but also that, like most precious things, it's very deep and you have to dig to get it.

# EDWARD FITZGERALD

## The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • PIERRE SZAMEK • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I suspect that if grandfather had a copy of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* on his shelves—at least any grandfather that I can think of who lived fifty years ago—he must have got it as a gift, as I got mine when I was a boy. Perhaps it was when he was about sixteen or seventeen and when skepticism for the first time could seem a romantic and pleasant idea. In fact, Omar Khayyam's was the first book I read in my youth that gave me the idea that philosophy was not always something mathematical and difficult but perhaps something that one enjoyed as a kind of minor-key pleasure in life.

*Michalopoulos:* It can be a very pleasant occupation, yes. But before we get into that, Mr. Bryson, I would like to clear up three characters that we have here. We have the illusive grandfather . . .

*Bryson:* Whose bookshelf we're discussing.

*Michalopoulos:* Yes! Now, I want to know who this man was. Because it's not my grandfather. He died in 1890, and he was a very vigorous person. He translated Byron into Greek and he translated Immanuel Kant into Greek. But he certainly would not have been caught dead with Omar Khayyam on his bookshelf. The second figure that I think we've got to discuss is Fitzgerald, because we get Omar Khayyam through Fitzgerald, and he is a personage in his own right. Then there is Omar himself, Omar the philosopher, who also had other attributes and other occupations which I think make him a more serious person than a poet.

*Szamek:* As for your grandfather, Mr. Michalopoulos, if he didn't read Omar, he was a very extraordinary grandfather, because Omar was the rage of the plush-lined Victorian parlors of his time.

*Bryson:* Yes, I think your grandfather is out of this partly because he translated Byron into Greek, Mr. Michalopoulos. After all, that wasn't a grandfatherly occupation universally accepted.

*Michalopoulos:* No, probably not.

*Bryson:* It's rather special, you know. I think Mr. Szamek is

right. I think most of our grandfathers and grandmothers—perhaps grandmothers even more than grandfathers—took Omar as a pleasant and innocent escape from the puritanism that still rode them rather hard.

*Michalopoulos*: The grandaunts.

*Bryson*: Yes, the grandaunts even more than grandfathers. I don't think that really matters very much. What was it that Omar was to them?

*Michalopoulos*: Well now, before we get down to that, is it what was Omar through Fitzgerald to them? Or is it what was Omar, really?

*Bryson*: Of course, they never got Omar, really. They got Omar through Fitzgerald. What was Fitzgerald to them?

*Szamek*: Fitzgerald and Omar, in this case, were very much intertwined. What they got was the red meat of Omar with the fat trimmed off by Fitzgerald.

*Michalopoulos*: Red meat in Omar?

*Szamek*: Whatever red meat there is. I think there is some red meat in Omar.

*Michalopoulos*: I think it's marshmallows.

*Bryson*: Do you think, Mr. Szamek, that Fitzgerald translated Omar with true scholarship? After all, you know more of the Oriental languages than I do and, I suppose, more than Mr. Michalopoulos does.

*Michalopoulos*: I know nothing of the Oriental languages.

*Bryson*: Unless Greek is an Oriental language.

*Michalopoulos*: It certainly is not: "*Persicos odi, puer, apparatus.*"

*Bryson*: Yes, I realize that your attitude toward Persians is an inheritance maybe three thousand years old, Mr. Michalopoulos.

*Michalopoulos*: Twenty-five centuries.

*Bryson*: It's an ancient Greek hatred of the Eastern menace.

*Szamek*: Well, there is some justification in it, because to the Western mind—to my mind for instance—there is a little too much of this overpowering scent of the Orient in Omar. You can't get away from that. There's the smell of lotus seed blossoms and rose wafers.

*Michalopoulos*: Each morn a thousand roses brings, you say;  
Yes, but where leaves the rose of yesterday?  
And this first summer month that brings the rose  
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away.

It means nothing!

*Szamek*: But isn't it possible that that is the very attraction of Omar? Take its great popularity at the turn of the century, when England, for instance, where the great revival started was bleak, and cold, and almost prissy. Here, all at once, is this flaming life, somewhere far away, where you don't have the London fogs, where you have warmth, where you have silks and satins and the singing of lutes and pleasant maidens swishing about.

*Bryson*: Well now, Fitzgerald was an English gentleman of

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eccentric intellectual habits, of great scholarship and learning; he fell under the spell of what he thought was great literature, not only in Omar but also in Hafiz, and he thought he was really bringing some great poetry into English and, in that way, to the English people. Now, is the fascination of this book to be dismissed as recklessly as this? Is the book nothing at all?

*Michalopoulos*: I wouldn't say that. To be perhaps a little more serious than I have been so far on this subject, let me ask you this: Has your experience been the same as mine? I have never, before having read the book for today, read it all the way through. I've dipped in it, read a verse or two, got a certain sickly satisfaction out of it, and said, "This is nice stuff." You can read four lines and say, "Why, this is rather good. It's musical; it doesn't mean very much; it's an escape from life; it's a sort of fatalistic view that nothing is worth very much and we've got to live with the sensual pleasures of today." And that's that! You read one verse, two verses, three; when you've read six verses, well, you just close the book. At least, that's been my experience.

*Szamek*: I would change only one word. I would say perhaps that it's comfortable stuff, not nice stuff.

*Bryson*: Did you ever read it through before?

*Szamek*: No, never.

*Bryson*: I'll have to disagree with both of you.

*Michalopoulos*: Did you read it through?

*Bryson*: Oh yes. The first time I ever was given a copy of it, which, as I say, was when I was sixteen, I was very much taken with this. This was, in my experience, the first book I read that gave me an escape from the puritanism which was my birthright. You see, Mr. Michalopoulos, I didn't have your advantages. I didn't get Horace until later. Now, your Western phase of Epicureanism as translated into Horace is different.

*Michalopoulos*: It's positive, it's wonderful. It's just as Epicurean; it's just, if you like, as hedonistic. But there's a basis to it. Take Horace, for instance, in this:

Hear now the pretty laugh that tells,  
In what dim corner lurks thy love,  
And snatch a bracelet or a glove,  
From wrist or hand that scarce rebels.

That's charming! It appeals. It's not this sickly stuff. There's a bracelet there, there's a nice slender arm; you take the bracelet, the wrist rebels, and there's a struggle and there is, no doubt, capitulation.

*Szamek*: But there is one thing which we haven't spoken about. We look at all of these writings with a Western eye, and listen to them with a Western ear. If you accept all this as coming out of the culture which produced this writing, if you take it, again, as a product of this indolent clime, there is much to appreciate.

*Michalopoulos*: I don't like indolent climates and I don't like omphaloscopy.

*Bryson*: But now wait a minute, Mr. Michalopoulos. You don't like them, but what we're trying to find out is why the people fifty

years ago did like them. They *did*, you know. The people of the English culture, which you admire quite as much as I do and which you know better than I, you know perfectly well, without my having to insist upon it this way, fifty years ago did read Omar and they loved it.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh, they certainly did.

*Bryson*: Now, were they completely out of their minds at the moment?

*Michalopoulos*: I don't know. You see, they always produced him in very fancy little editions, with highly-colored illustrations.

*Bryson*: Sometimes very serious illustrations. The Elihu Vedder edition, for instance, has pictures which look almost like illustrations for Blake.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes.

*Szamek*: The thing to look for is what this man Omar talks about. There are three things: eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. He goes through a hundred of these rubai or quatrains, eating and drinking and being merry, in anticipation of the death which comes to all of us. In that sense there is some pleasure in the reading. There is some release; there is no yesterday; and there will be no tomorrow; but there is a today.

*Michalopoulos*: But there's no philosophical solution.

*Szamek*: There's no solution whatever.

*Michalopoulos*: There's no solution whatever, and there's no thought, really.

*Szamek*: On the other hand, is there a solution in Horace? Is there a solution anywhere, as long as Horace died, which he did?

*Michalopoulos*: No. No.

*Bryson*: Is there a solution in any Epicurean philosophy?

*Michalopoulos*: There's no solution in Horace, but, at least, there is some sort of act. Horace, after all, did develop the farm that was given to him. He developed it, and he was a gentleman farmer and a successful one, and he was also a soldier.

*Bryson*: Mr. Michalopoulos, you're escaping from Horace's poetry to Horace. Let's talk about Omar for a moment.

*Michalopoulos*: But that is why I said what I did about Fitzgerald and about Omar, because I think Fitzgerald was possibly a shiftless individual who wrote very well.

*Bryson*: Well, let's leave him out for a moment. Any shiftless individual that writes very well is still an important individual if he writes that well. Let's go back to Omar. He was not just a dilettante, was he?

*Michalopoulos*: No, he wasn't. Omar was a very great man in other fields. He was a great mathematician. He actually helped to produce a calendar, worked out by himself and seven other wise men about nine hundred years ago, which Gibbon says surpasses the Julian calendar and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style.

*Szamek*: But it was never adopted.

*Michalopoulos*: It wasn't adopted.

*Bryson*: Omar was a great mathematician. His calling himself

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a tent-maker, of course, probably refers to some unfortunate episode in his life, or it's merely allegorical. He was a great mathematician; he was a great astronomer; he was a very important advisor to the ruler of his day. Now, if you're going to justify Horace by his works, you'll have to justify Omar by his works, too.

*Michalopoulos*: No, the man Omar doesn't bother me.

*Bryson*: Oh, I see.

*Michalopoulos*: No, he doesn't bother me; it's Fitzgerald that bothers me much more. And the presentation of Omar to the English-speaking world bothers me. I'm willing to take Omar's poetry as the dilettante effort of a cultured man who has other occupations and, in his hours of leisure, gives himself over to Epicurean verse.

*Szamek*: That is somewhat unfair both to Omar and to Fitzgerald, Mr. Michalopoulos, because, if one dips into the Persian writings of a thousand years before this period of Omar, he discovers the same saccharine style of writing. Fitzgerald didn't invent that. As for the negative viewpoint, I think that you can overcome that by saying that there is one great affirmation in Omar Khayyam—throughout the whole of the *Rubaiyat* he sings one theme. And that is this: seize hold of the nearest piece of today and do something with it.

*Michalopoulos*: Not do something with it. Just enjoy it.

*Bryson*: That's what Epicurus says.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, all right!

*Bryson*: That's what Horace says. It's a Western as well as an Eastern tradition, Mr. Michalopoulos. You just don't like this expression of it.

*Michalopoulos*: Well, what I say is this: apparently Omar wrote about a thousand of these quatrains—we have a hundred and one of them—and I can't read more than ten of them without getting sick. But I can read two and enjoy them. It's like eating marshmallows. Now, there are certain Eastern monarchs today who can spend three days on end eating chocolate with marshmallows in them and then getting violently sick.

*Bryson*: Yes, I know. But this is partly a matter of age, Mr. Michalopoulos. Very young people can eat lots more marshmallows and read lots more Omar than people of your age or mine.

*Szamek*: I don't know. Young people can get just as sick of marshmallows, Mr. Bryson. . . .

*Bryson*: But it takes more.

*Szamek*: It takes more of the marshmallows. Of course, if you get stuff like this of Omar's:

Ah, moon of my delight who knowest no wane,

The moon of heaven is rising once again . . .

that is marshmallow! But here is one of the rubai which everyone knows; not many people know perhaps that it is from the *Rubaiyat*:

The moving finger writes and, having writ,

Moves on. Nor all thy piety nor wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,

Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

All is the product of that great, great wheel of fate. That is

purely Oriental thinking, which goes back into the roots of the Rig-Veda, and which extends on into all of the Oriental writings even of today.

*Michalopoulos*: Yes, it is the *vanitas vanitatem*, I suppose.

*Bryson*: I could make an argument here on behalf of your favorite, Horace, Mr. Michalopoulos, but I'm not going to do so.

*Michalopoulos*: I would include Catullus in that, too.

*Bryson*: And Lucretius, for that matter. You want to take the whole Western Greek and Latin tradition to pit against Omar.

*Michalopoulos*: Anacreon, for instance. Anacreon is wine-soaked, just as wine-soaked as Omar.

*Szamek*: In a nicer way.

*Michalopoulos*: In a more active way. He'll thump his foot on the ground—and so will Horace:

*"Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero*

*Polsanda tellus . . ."*

Well, there's action there. There's not this supine wallowing in a "book of verse, a jug of wine and thou."

*Szamek*: Well, in that respect Omar is something of a comedian as well as a tragedian. There's much which is comic in the entire *Rubaiyat*, and yet some of the comedy in him is a comic writing in a high classic style. I think Lin Yutang gave the perfect answer to that. Omar is constantly speaking of death, and what will come afterwards; suppose the maiden with whom he dallies today walks through the garden tomorrow and he will no longer be there. In this sense he's quite a tragedian. Lin Yutang said that we forgive the great of this world only when they are dead; and we do it because, by their being dead we feel that they've gotten even with themselves and we have gotten even with them, and because every funeral procession carries with it a triumphal banner which reads, "the equality of man." That is the same song which Omar is singing. The dead are dead, but he is still alive. Poor fools, they; lucky he. That is both comic and tragic.

*Bryson*: Is that what Omar really sings? I'd like to get back to this question of whether Fitzgerald betrays Omar. I can't answer it, because I don't know enough about the Orient.

*Michalopoulos*: I would say probably not. I think it's a very good translation, except that, since this is Fitzgerald's magnum opus, he's given a lot of his own thought and intellectual activity to it. I would like to think that this is a sideline of Omar's activities, and that his real life was in his astronomy, in his algebra (he published a treatise on algebra), in his calendar, in all these constructive and very useful things that he did for his people and for his employers—whereas Fitzgerald spent his life sailing a boat.

*Bryson*: Come now! Let's leave Fitzgerald out of this. I happen to have a very great fondness for Fitzgerald, based upon his letters, which I think are about the most wonderful letters in the English language. What about Omar?

*Szamek*: As far as the greatness of Omar goes, I think that Mr. Michalopoulos is quite right. He is great as a scientist and his poetry

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is a casual sideline. He is sitting in the bazaars, a cracker barrel philosopher, a Casanova of the Koran, dreaming, with his wine, women, and song. And I think that whatever good there is in our present version of Fitzgerald is Fitzgerald's doing, because he has polished it up.

*Bryson:* So that Fitzgerald didn't betray Omar? What Fitzgerald gives us is fair Omar. Well now, let's get down to somewhat closer to the present day.

*Michalopoulos:* You see, Mr. Bryson, what I object to is the Anglo-Saxon slobbering over this.

*Bryson:* Yes, I know. I know by this time what you object to. But what I'm trying to find out is whether or not this thing, after all, did appeal to our grandfathers and grandmothers and grandaunts as a, not beautiful, but pretty, escape from the puritanism which otherwise surrounded them.

*Michalopoulos:* It was a polite excursion into the wicked world.

*Bryson:* All right, a polite and pretty excursion—something that didn't dirty them up at all. Has it any meaning for us today, or is it a past fashion. Does Omar still sell? Do people still buy Omar and give the *Rubaiyat* to young boys and young girls as an introduction to the hedonism of literature?

*Szamek:* It has probably reached that horrible state now in which it's required reading in English II, which is the death kiss.

*Bryson:* I don't think Omar Khayyam is required reading anywhere. But should it be?

*Szamek:* I think it should be, yes. If it's for that level of reader who will accept it for what it is.

*Bryson:* We're talking about required reading. Should it be in one's education?

*Szamek:* Yes, yes.

*Bryson:* Why?

*Szamek:* Because it gives a colorful picture of the period out of which it stems, because it also tells us how not to act, in one way.

*Bryson:* I think there's another thing it does, too. It gives us something which it is always salutary to remember. In the later part of the ten hundreds, at the end of the eleventh century, here was a man who could write of this over-luxurious civilization, a civilization that had in it great luxury, great beauty, and great comfort, at a time when Europe and our ancestors, most of them, were living huddled up either as peasants, starving on the soil, or as soldiers, or as monks.

*Michalopoulos:* Not even as soldiers. They were wearing the cross and going around as bandits and massacring other perfectly innocent people all over the world.

*Bryson:* That's right. This is the time of the Fourth Crusade. This is the very height of the feudal system, when Europe was probably the most brutal it has ever been.

*Michalopoulos:* Yes. In Omar's corner of the world at that time there was peace and a certain amount of civilization and a quiet



life. It was just before Genghis Khan came down and smashed that up, too.

*Bryson*: But there *was* quite a good deal of civilization.

*Michalopoulos*: Oh quite a good deal. Yes, certainly!

*Bryson*: The Renaissance, which came four and five hundred years later, came very largely because, at this time, the East was preserving what was left of the West's civilization.

*Szamek*: One more wonderful thing about Omar. He has no pretension. When he says:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about; but evermore

Came out by the same door I went in . . .

he admits that he knows nothing and no one knows anything.

*Michalopoulos*: He is, of course, attacking the priesthood.

*Szamek*: He is attacking all the artificial levels of knowledge. And that, again, is pure Oriental. If you go back a few hundred years to Chuang-Tse who said, "Only fools think they are awake and flatter themselves that they know whether they are princes or peasants; yet philosophers, yes, and you who hear this are both dreams, and I who say you are dreams, I am but a dream myself."

*Bryson*: But don't you, gentlemen, see that what you are doing is saying that through all literature of all civilizations there runs this recurrent note of the rejection of both philosophy and practical life, the Epicurean enjoyment of mild and more or less innocent pleasures? It's just a question of whether or not this is a great expression of it.

*Michalopoulos*: Ah, my beloved, fill the cup that clears  
Today of past regrets and future fears.  
Tomorrow—why, tomorrow I may be  
Myself with yesterday's seven thousand years.

He's not so bad, after all!

*Bryson*: No, he's not so bad. I'm glad that you're willing to come around and admit, Mr. Michalopoulos, that there is a certain amount of lyric lift and loveliness in it.

*Szamek*: And that is how Omar concludes all things, when he says: "Come, it will be well; he is a good fellow after all." And this is God and religion and all things which we face. It will come out well, after all.

*Bryson*: Yes, underneath this basic Epicurean skepticism and rejection of both learning and practical life, there is a kind of faith in the universe which I think is what gave our puritan ancestors the feeling that this incursion into wickedness was innocent.

# AUGUST STRINDBERG

## The Father

FRANCIS FERGUSSON • EVA LE GALLIENNE • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson*: I suspect that "grandfather" must have read Strindberg with a shudder, and quite possibly he didn't keep it on the open shelf for fear grandmother might have discovered it. She might have been disturbed to find out that he was willing even to read a book like that.

*LeGallienne*: Well, Mr. Bryson, I do hope that you and Mr. Fergusson don't agree with Strindberg's opinions on women—otherwise I shall have to run away.

*Bryson*: Mr. Fergusson, do you agree?

*Fergusson*: Well, Mr. Bryson, I think that Strindberg had a healthy respect for women along with all of the grim views he also had about women in general.

*Bryson*: He painted a very unhealthy picture of a woman in this play, Mr. Fergusson.

*Fergusson*: I should hasten to add, however, that I share his respect for what women are capable of at certain moments.

*Bryson*: I think he's being very euphemistic about his agreeing with Strindberg, Miss LeGallienne. It sounds to me as if he thought that women were just as much these moral monsters of enormous power and destructive capacity that Strindberg thought they were, but he doesn't want to put it into Strindberg's brutal terms. Is that right?

*Fergusson*: I wouldn't put it in Mr. Strindberg's brutal terms, but I think that anybody who reads *The Father* will also come out with a certain respect for the unchanged female ego. The play, of course, shows what happens when a man and a woman start playing the game of life without any rules; and perhaps that kind of a game is a good one in which to estimate the marvelous power that a woman can have.

*Bryson*: But in this case, Mr. Fergusson—I'm trying still to reassure Miss LeGallienne here—the woman's power is almost entirely for evil. She accomplishes no good purpose. She drives her husband to insanity and death. She completely dominates her daughter. At

least, that's the implication. She's now got the family, but what has she got? She's got ruin and moral degradation. Is that power?

*Fergusson*: It's power, all right, and, as long as the stakes of the game are only power—and it's explained in the course of the play that that's what the point is: we are struggling for power—if that is the only thing to be aimed for in running a family, then, certainly, the woman is justified with her success in grabbing the family.

*Bryson*: Even though she ruins the family!

*Fergusson*: Yes, granted the peculiar nature of the game and the stakes that they agree on.

*LeGallienne*: This play actually was the thing that wrecked Strindberg's own marriage, wasn't it? I should think it might when his wife read it. I should think that might have been the last straw.

*Bryson*: Well, Miss LeGallienne, we must say something on behalf of men here, since any discussion of Strindberg becomes a small mimic war of the sexes. We must say that Strindberg might have replied to your remark about this play having wrecked his marriage, that his play was a depiction of what wrecked his marriage. Perhaps he was only telling his own story. Of course his wife couldn't stay with him after he showed that this is what wives did. The machinery of his play is quite simple, isn't it? Here are a man and a woman who have a grown daughter, or a daughter come to the age when it's possible to send her away to school. The woman doesn't want the daughter to go, because she wants to keep her hands on everything. The father not only wants the daughter to go, but he plays the continental father, the omnipotent. It's nobody's business, he says, what I want to do with our child; you're only the mother; you have nothing to say. He's rather stupid and hides a neurotic sensibility under that stupidity, because he's really frightened; he's afraid of his wife.

*LeGallienne*: Of course, he is!

*Bryson*: They've been at each other's throats morally for a long time.

*LeGallienne*: I have a theory that, actually, his hatred of women comes from his worship of women.

*Bryson*: You mean his worship of what they should be! The play starts with one of the minor characters, a servant, becoming the father of an illegitimate child and saying, in effect: Well, I can't take care of the child because I'm not sure I'm its father. I've never seen this on the stage, but what, even in reading, appears to be an extraordinary psychological deftness, this woman plants in her own husband's mind the idea that perhaps he has no right to say what shall happen to this daughter, because she may not really be his child, and he goes crazy. That's all there is to the play, isn't it?

*LeGallienne*: Yes!

*Bryson*: He goes crazy and dies. She has reduced him to insanity with that suggestion.

*LeGallienne*: Yes, that's perfectly true.

*Fergusson*: But she uses a great many ways to do that besides throwing doubt on his paternity.

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*Bryson*: That's the key, though, isn't it?

*Fergusson*: That is the thing that finally breaks him, I believe, his doubt that he is actually the father. Yet we get a terrible sense of the squalling and fighting that goes on in the house day after day. There are the three women who are there, his wife, his daughter, and—is it his mother-in-law?

*LeGallienne*: No, the old nurse is the one that actually is in the play.

*Fergusson*: But, then, grandma is behind this.

*LeGallienne*: Yes, she's off stage, very importantly.

*Bryson*: But the daughter is not much more than the stake. She doesn't do much.

*LeGallienne*: Oh, no, the daughter isn't very important, actually.

*Fergusson*: She has a very good off-stage squabble with grandma at one point. Grandma wants her to do some spirit writing for her, and the daughter is too tired, and we hear them screaming offstage. That's the sort of thing, which, in the long run, I'm sure would have gotten on the poor old captain's nerves and made him accessible to all of these innuendos.

*LeGallienne*: Yes, you do feel that he's in this house surrounded by a lot of females and that they've all driven him crazy.

*Bryson*: I'm not sure that that is the whole meaning of the play. After all, there are other male characters here. There are two other male characters of some importance besides the minor ones who give the excuse for the intrigue. There's the doctor who understands what's going on and tries to stop it and fails. There's also the pastor who is the brother of the woman and who, as soon as he sees that the woman is winning in this game of completely ruthless wits, is on her side. He rather admires her for what she's done to her husband. So, all this may mean that it's not only women, but a certain kind of man, that believes a marriage is only a struggle for power, and that it doesn't matter what you use as long as you win. I was very much puzzled by the remark of the pastor which shows that he obviously admires his sister for having overcome her husband in a war that he knows has been going on for a long time. After all, he's a clergyman. . . .

*LeGallienne*: Yes!

*Bryson*: But he has no condemnation for her behavior whatever.

*LeGallienne*: Do you think they all think the man is mad? Do you think they really believe he's mad?

*Fergusson*: No, I don't.

*Bryson*: The pastor might, but I don't believe so.

*Fergusson*: I don't think any of them really think he is mad.

*Bryson*: Not even the man himself, Mr. Fergusson?

*Fergusson*: The captain is willing to admit that he's finished, but I'm not sure that he's licked. I don't think he thinks he's really mad. What kills him finally is a providential stroke, which comes at just the right time to bring down the final curtain. It's just a failure of moral power to survive what he's going through, rather than technical madness, that finishes him.

*Bryson*: Well, now, what do you do with a play like this that's sixty-odd years old and seems, when you read it, to be a kind of museum piece? We have many modern writers who hate women, and they may hate women quite as much as Strindberg does, but they don't make them monsters of moral destructiveness. They make them ridiculous by talking about their physiology and reducing them to an animal level instead of raising them to the level of female Lucifers.

*LeGallienne*: In a way, Strindberg pays women a compliment by his hatred, because I do think it stems from a great worship of women. His tendency is to put woman on such a high pedestal that no living woman could ever succeed in fulfilling his dream of the ideal woman. Therefore, he turns the medal and makes her into a monster—into a fallen angel, if you like.

*Bryson*: Are you going to leave Freud out of this, Miss LeGallienne?

*LeGallienne*: I'm afraid I don't know very much about Freud. But what a holiday the psychoanalysts would have with Mr. Strindberg.

*Bryson*: Especially in talking about how he must have loved his mother too much.

*Fergusson*: The psychoanalysts have had a holiday with him already.

*LeGallienne*: I bet they had!

*Fergusson*: He wanted any woman to be the all-purpose woman.

*LeGallienne*: Did he have a great mother complex?

*Fergusson*: Yes, I think his trouble was in trying to think of the same woman in both roles at one and the same time and then being very annoyed with her when she could not be everything all at once, so I agree with you that he was demanding something superhuman.

*LeGallienne*: I feel that very strongly.

*Bryson*: He demanded too much, and, when he found that women were only human like men, he said: These are only monsters and we must be afraid of them.

*LeGallienne*: Then he immediately said they're monsters. He doesn't just say they're human. He says they must be monsters.

*Bryson*: He married three of them.

*LeGallienne*: Yes, he did. He couldn't keep away from them.

*Bryson*: Were any of his marriages happy?

*LeGallienne*: No!

*Bryson*: Perhaps he was merely philosophically upset. But I would like to put up to your expert judgment, Miss LeGallienne, this question. Is he a good playwright?—for the stage, I mean, not to be read now. After all, we read him in an awkward translation.

*LeGallienne*: Yes, very bad translation. I think he's been almost as much, perhaps even more, betrayed in translation as Ibsen.

*Bryson*: But does he play well?

*LeGallienne*: Very recently this play was played on Broadway—I think only a year ago. Raymond Massey and Mady Christians played it, and it didn't seem a museum piece. It held the audience absolutely.

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*Bryson*: And people didn't laugh at the wrong places.

*LeGallienne*: No, they didn't laugh. They were held in a sort of grim hypnotic state. It had immense impact.

*Bryson*: Well, then, let's call him a good craftsman of the theatre and a good dramatist.

*LeGallienne*: I think he is. My only reservation is that, to me, a play like this is not terribly important because it's based upon sickly things, upon pathological things.

*Fergusson*: But I think that part of its power, which it certainly has, is due to that fact. We all have some potentiality for that kind of illness and that obsessive quality. And that hypnotic quality that you mention probably comes from his appeal to those possibilities in us. We are held as by a nightmare.

*LeGallienne*: That's true!

*Bryson*: You're talking about the illness, Mr. Fergusson, of Strindberg himself?

*Fergusson*: Yes.

*Bryson*: But his own neuroticism was partly philosophical, wasn't it? I mean, it wasn't just that he was ill. He read the wrong books also, didn't he?

*LeGallienne*: He was influenced by Nietzsche enormously. I think that's what built up his ego to where it almost became madness with him. He was mad on several occasions.

*Fergusson*: Yes, he was actually mad several times and finally spent about a year in an asylum. He was always on the edge, and yet I would agree with Mr. Bryson that we must blame his *unsane* philosophizing partly for that condition. He did demand too much of human life, too much of his life, too much of the women that he married.

*LeGallienne*: Also, he was terrifically torn between a great religious and spiritual side of himself and a kind of dark side that was almost black magic. It seems to me he was like two people; one was a black magician and the other a white magician.

*Bryson*: That could be good for a dramatist.

*LeGallienne*: Very good! He played one against the other constantly.

*Fergusson*: The plan for the staging of his play shows a wonderful skill which comes from his black magic, all right. For instance, when the nurse finally traps the father into putting on the straight-jacket at the end, that is a marvelous theatrical idea. She practically sings him a lullaby as she slips the sleeves over him.

*LeGallienne*: That's right.

*Fergusson*: I have always felt that that was an echo of the place in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in which Peer is singing his mother to sleep as she dies. Only this time, characteristically, Strindberg has the man sung to death by the brooding maternal female, whereas Peer had done it the other way around. But it's extremely effective theatrically.

*LeGallienne*: Yes, of course!

*Bryson*: What about throwing the lamp? The climax of physical

violence comes when the captain, in the beginnings of insane fury, throws the lamp at his wife.

*Fergusson*: I take Miss LeGallienne's word for it that that can be gotten away with on the stage, but I think of that as being the "James Thurber aspect" of Strindberg.

*LeGallienne*: I think it would be wonderful to have an edition of Strindberg illustrated by Thurber.

*Bryson*: I don't think he hates women.

*LeGallienne*: But think of the faces he would put on these women!

*Bryson*: But see what you're doing! You're finding in this man, who is absolutely of a piece in seriousness and neuroticism—you're finding him faintly comic. Is that because our attitude toward women has changed? Or because our attitude toward literature has changed?

*LeGallienne*: But his attitude toward women was not a sane attitude, truly.

*Bryson*: Well, is the attitude of some of our modern novelists a sane attitude toward women?

*LeGallienne*: Wasn't it awfully warped, Strindberg's attitude in this play particularly?

*Bryson*: Which is better, Miss LeGallienne, to make a woman a moral monster or to make her a mere animal?

*LeGallienne*: Does she have to be either one?

*Bryson*: Well, I should say not. She is something else altogether, perhaps a combination—which makes it much more interesting and much more satisfactory. But our modern novelists seem to me to have gone from one of these mistakes to the other, so that I don't think we can laugh at Strindberg unless we're willing to laugh at them.

*LeGallienne*: It all comes from fear of women. When men say dreadful things about women, I'm sure it's because they're afraid of them.

*Fergusson*: Well, if you are after a monster it's much more fun to have a moral monster than just a physiological oddity. That's one reason why Strindberg is so effective. Of course, Euripides had a similar talent for digging up the possible moral horror.

*Bryson*: Yes, but there's a word to be said on Medea's side, for instance, and there's nothing to be said on the side of this wife.

*LeGallienne*: It doesn't seem to me that there is. She just seems like a complete monster and rather a grotesque one.

*Bryson*: On that count, I would say that our feeling is that this is outmoded romanticism. That is, we don't think that anybody can be this morally depraved and be sane, do we?

*LeGallienne*: No, I don't think so.

*Bryson*: We don't think this is in any sense true to life, even in any representative ideal sense.

*Fergusson*: I'm sure it isn't, but, there again, the power comes partly from that fact. It's only the very, very greatest who can succeed in presenting both potentialities for horror in the human situation and a sufficiently balanced view so that we can place it

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somewhere. Strindberg was not that great, but he had the power to bring the horrors out and make them terribly effective on the stage.

*Bryson*: I'm glad to be able to ask this in your presence, Miss LeGallienne, since you are Scandinavian at least in part—I wouldn't dare ask it if there were no one here to answer—I'd like to ask if there's anything peculiar about Scandinavian women, because Strindberg and Ibsen seemed to be very much obsessed with this power of women.

*LeGallienne*: Well, women have quite a lot of power.

*Bryson*: Of course, they have! But do they have more in Scandinavia than elsewhere?

*LeGallienne*: I think that the women in Scandinavia were emancipated much earlier than they were either in England or in this country.

*Bryson*: This is, after all, 1887.

*LeGallienne*: Yes! It seems to me that there was more freedom for women there, especially mental and spiritual freedom. They became human beings earlier than we did in England or here.

*Bryson*: But that should have taken the tension out of the situation instead of making it worse.

*LeGallienne*: Except that it would have given women more power, I suppose. I mean, they were not just little nonentities that could be, you know, shut up either in the kitchen or the drawingroom and who were of so little account that you didn't have to pay any attention to them, to what they thought, or to what they felt.

*Bryson*: Have you any idea what the people of his own time thought about this play? Does anybody know what success it had?

*LeGallienne*: It was a great shock at the time.

*Bryson*: You mean, people said women are not like this?

*LeGallienne*: Well, it was sort of a slap-in-the-face. It caused a great deal of commotion at the time. It was played, I think, very successfully in Paris, and it was more successful, of course, outside of Sweden, than at home—in Germany and in France, and also in Denmark.

*Bryson*: That's always true when you have something terrific like this. People can always say—well, that can happen in Sweden but not in France.

*LeGallienne*: That's right! Well, it's the same case with Ibsen. His plays were successful away from Norway before they were ever done in Norway.

*Fergusson*: Ibsen, however, seems to have felt that the battles for freeing women were still to be fought. Perhaps that's the difference between Norway and other parts of Scandinavia.

*LeGallienne*: Well, Ibsen thought that it was good to free women, whereas Strindberg didn't want them freed. You know, Strindberg used to call Ibsen and Bjornson "the Nora men" with great contempt, because he thought that *The Doll's House* was such a ridiculous play.

*Bryson*: What did he do when Ibsen wrote *Hedda Gabler*? She was a moral monster in a small way.



*LeGallienne*: Strindberg was delighted at that. Only he said that it was due to him that Ibsen had written *Hedda Gabler*, that he was the one who had put the seeds into Ibsen's mind.

*Bryson*: He's the man who explained women to Ibsen?

*LeGallienne*: That's right!

*Bryson*: Well, that's something of a deduction.

*Fergusson*: It would have been better, I think, if Strindberg had learned a little from Ibsen. If you can imagine a play which understood the problem, from the point of view of the woman as well as *The Doll's House*, and from the point of view of the long-suffering and somewhat beat-up male as well as the *The Father*, then you would get a really terrific drama, don't you think so?

*LeGallienne*: That's a very interesting idea. But I don't think Strindberg could have been very happy collaborating with Ibsen!

*Bryson*: All of Ibsen's characters, and plots too, perhaps don't go deeper than Strindberg's, but they seem to me to be so much more complicated in their message and their apparatus. They have more real comprehension of life.

*LeGallienne*: Of course, Ibsen was an enormously sane person.

*Fergusson*: Also it took him about two years to write one of his good plays, and Strindberg dashed off *The Father* in a couple of months.

*LeGallienne*: Even less! I think it was fourteen days or something like that.

*Bryson*: Yes! Well, of course, the structure of the play, this almost miraculous simplicity, shows that he just took a feeling, a dramatic situation at its very peak, cut off the peak and put it on the stage. Isn't it a great tribute to the sheer dramatic genius of the man that an attitude which we now would say is not only neurotic, but even old-fashionedly neurotic, still holds us because of the power of presentation?

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# OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

## *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*

CATHERINE DRINKER BOWEN • JOHN MASON BROWN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In trying to catch up with grandfather's bookshelf and rereading a lot of the books that may have been there, I found that this book, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, is the one that gave me the most sheer pleasure. I had read it. I had forgotten how delightful it was, and I'd forgotten above all how vigorous and, in many cases, how profound it was. It's not like anything anybody seems to write now. I wish they did.

*Bowen:* What amazes me about this book is that, although it came out in 1857, in *The Atlantic*, Holmes had thought of it, and had had some of it published when he was only twenty-one.

*Bryson:* That was a long time before, Mrs. Bowen.

*Bowen:* A long time before! Apparently he was a born writer. Then it went into frequent book editions right up into the twentieth century.

*Brown:* Well, that interruption of the years between the first pieces then, when he was in his twenties, and the ones when he was nearing fifty is responsible, I suppose, for one of the finest leads that any book has ever had. *The Autocrat*, which is the first in the series, then *The Poet* and *The Professor*, constitute one of the most triumphant and endearing examples of column writing known in the history of literary journalism.

*Bryson:* What do you mean by "column writing," Mr. Brown? Is that a word by which you mean to pull this book down from literary eminence?

*Brown:* I said "literary journalism," but this is far more than journalism. May I quickly add that what I mean is journalism to the extent that it was written to meet a deadline. The story, as everybody knows, is that, when James Russell Lowell founded the *Atlantic Monthly*, he turned to Holmes, who was then fairly well-known, but certainly not famous, and he happened to strike in Holmes the ideal contributor, because these pieces, which we now know as *The Auto-*

*crat of the Breakfast Table*, these written conversations, apparently captured not only the country's imagination but the world's admiration.

*Bowen*: Also the world's affection! One of the things that I think is odd, and fortunate for Dr. Holmes, as his generation called him, was that he seemed to find the form that suited him best almost at the outset of his career. He was an essayist. He wrote two or three novels, but he always came back to the essay, and the last things he published, when he was very old, were *Over the Teacups*.

*Bryson*: Well, now, Mrs. Bowen, you know about this period and these people, I suppose, more than anybody else. At any rate, you've spent a good many, shall I say, laborious hours studying them, faithful hours.

*Bowen*: Pleasurable hours.

*Bryson*: Can you . . . can you decide, after looking these things over, what is the secret of this affection and charm? What is it? Is it wit?

*Bowen*: I think the secret lies in Dr. Holmes' own personality. Of course, he was a born writer and could express his personality or it wouldn't have worked, because just thinking something isn't enough. But people really did seem to love him and have a great affection for him, because there's honesty to these pieces and there's a wit.

*Brown*: There is a vast, vast humanity underneath the wit. We in America have a phrase that everybody knows—which describes Will Rogers—a cracker barrel philosopher. But Holmes is a philosopher, it seems to me, of a totally different kind, equally witty, much more so, really. He is a port, sherry decanter, and mahogany table wit rather than the cracker barrel type.

*Bryson*: And philosopher, Mr. Brown. I was tempted a while ago to say "homely philosopher," and I realize that word isn't good enough.

*Brown*: You would have been committing what he himself would have described as verbicide.

*Bowen*: One of the secrets is the fact that, among that whole group of excessively literary people in Boston, he was the only scientist and the only one with a scientific training.

*Brown*: He brought his glitteringly rationalistic point of view into a transcendental circle.

*Bowen*: He did; and there was a realism about him. He was very impatient with a lot of those people. For instance, he went to school with Margaret Fuller when they were very young, and he used to be very annoyed because she told Dick Dana, another of their classmates, that she used to stand on the stairs and, "I asked myself," she said, "who is this Margaret Fuller? How came I to be Margaret Fuller?" That annoyed Dr. Holmes even in boyhood.

*Brown*: Well, Dr. Holmes, of course, had his self-assurance, but I don't think it was ever conceit, truly conceit. It was a kind of healthy arrogance which sprang from his own honest knowledge that he had an intellectual superiority.

*Bryson*: Well, he did, and he was quite right in showing it.

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This point that Mrs. Bowen makes, that he was a born writer and that what he had to say really showed what he wanted to say, has some relation to the kind of man he was. You say he wasn't conceited, and yet you have quoted, Mrs. Bowen, the fact that when he was making his fight as a physician against the stupid conservatism of his physician contemporaries in their attitude toward childbed fever—he was one of the great pioneers, of course, in trying to get rid of that—he said "I'm too much in earnest . . ." What was it?

*Bowen:* "I am too much in earnest either for humility or vanity."

*Bryson:* Too much in earnest for either humility or vanity. Well, in his books that tremendous—to use a word almost worn out—that tremendous sincerity does count, doesn't it?

*Bowen:* He has a truly shining liberalism based upon humanity. It's nothing saccharin, but an intellectual control of the heart. There's the willingness to surrender, and yet the intellectual control is there. Norman Cousins once dismissed a certain kind of contemporary writing as being "dry-eyed" and said he wanted writing that was more than dry-eyed. Holmes can be dry-minded, but he has the capacity for emotional understanding to an extraordinary degree.

*Bowen:* Let me read you something brief right here. In the very early version of *The Autocrat* somebody speaks up and says at the breakfast table: "I have heard you spoken of as a respectable young man," said a fellow creature. "I am not a respectable young man," Holmes replied. "If I were nothing better, I would take an anodyne that should make me sleep until the funeral flame of the universe had split the stone above me." That was written when he was twenty-one, and that's hardly cracker barrel philosophy. It's a little more.

*Brown:* It's much more. That's my point. It's a switch of gears and goes to what is not humor but high wit plus extraordinary knowledge.

*Bryson:* And sometimes, Mr. Brown, there is, as you indicated, a frank trust in sentiment which seems a little old-fashioned, but which is something we've lost.

*Brown:* Yes!

*Bowen:* I think it is a great relief.

*Bryson:* To find somebody who's willing to be sentimental?

*Bowen:* Yes, and not at all afraid of it.

*Brown:* Well, I think the moment has come when we ought to have the courage of our bromides.

*Bryson:* But these are so much more than bromides! When I reread this book, although I was delighted with it, I realized again that it was genuinely witty. I was surprised that I'd forgotten how serious and vigorous it is in passages, how profoundly tragic Holmes can be when he wants to be. Here is a passage which should be famous but isn't: "Every person's feelings have a front door and a side door by which they may be entered." Later on he says, "Be very careful to whom you trust one of these keys of the side door. The fact of possessing one renders those even who are dear to you very terrible at times." That man knew what broke people's hearts.

*Brown:* Don't you think one of the reasons you so admire him is

not only because of the originality of the turn of mind, but the originality of the sense of comparison. He had an extraordinary gift for the image and the comparison. Do you remember—and this is not unapplicable in this year of political discussion—when he likened a bigot to the pupil of the eye? He likened a bigot to the pupil of the eye for this reason. He said, "The more light you pour on it, the more it contracts." I know no happier definition or demolition of a bigot's mind.

*Bryson*: That's wonderful!

*Bowen*: All of that made the book very hard to translate. He was one of the most popular authors of his time, and everybody got hold of him. Did you know that the Germans published an edition of *The Autocrat*? They called it *Der Tisch Despot*, which, I think, couldn't have been less applicable.

*Brown*: It seems to me one of the most unfortunate Germanisms that I can think of.

*Bowen*: And the French were terribly upset! They wondered how this could be a family breakfast table! Apparently the French had never heard of such a thing.

*Brown*: I would like, in defense of France, to rise not like Joan, but stalwartly, and say that one of the difficulties is the machinery—to have that many people get up that early in the morning and before the first cup of coffee face that much brilliance! There are people who prefer silent breakfasts; but this is the articulate breakfast table.

*Bryson*: That's the only really false note in the whole thing. Nobody ever could have been like this at the breakfast table, and nobody ever would have listened to him even in Boston in the middle of the nineteenth century.

*Bowen*: Well, I have sympathy with him, because I'm one of those people that gets up feeling perfectly wonderful and tapers off until, by half-past-eight at night, I can't think of anything to say. I believe perfectly that all those people sat at the breakfast table and all were willing to listen to him.

*Bryson*: You don't have any sympathy with the man who says: "Until I have finished breakfast there will be silence in this house?"

*Bowen*: Well, perhaps some.

*Brown*: I think that man ought to stay silent *after* he has finished breakfast!

*Bryson*: Well, he probably does, but what he insists is that *other* people be silent before breakfast.

*Brown*: Mr. Bryson, I think what is really exciting in the book is that it is delectable reading. But it is also difficult reading. It is so thoughtful, and the transitions are so many, and the subjects touched upon are so limitless, that you really have to reread and digest. It's one of these things to savor, not to rush through.

*Bryson*: And the transitions are so bold. No preparation, no attempt to slide from one thing to another.

*Brown*: That is why he seems to be almost more than an essayist, certainly in the nineteenth-century sense of the word. He seems to be almost the first long paragrapher. He had that enviable gift of

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making the essay short and absolutely irresistible with sanity and heart.

*Bowen:* Now, Mr. Brown, you're a lecturer, and I found it fascinating that he does not try to write up his lectures—which is a very hard thing to do—but he writes about his lectures. You remember where he said a thoroughly popular lecture ought to have nothing in it which five hundred people cannot all take in a flash just as it is uttered? Do you agree with that?

*Brown:* Oh, I would agree wholeheartedly because it is true not only in lecturing, but in the theatre, and even in church, if I may say so on Sunday. What you have in the group mind, almost always, is surrender of altitude that exists in the individual mind. The group entity is quite different from the individual entity. I think he's wonderful about lecturing because he really tells the truth. He knows the truth of what John Anderson used to say. John Anderson used to say: "It's much better to change towns than it is to change lectures." He knows that a lecture is something that has to be brought to a kind of perfection like a theatrical performance. It has to be tried out on an audience, played with. Holmes writes about it delectably, I think.

*Bowen:* He says that the hundred and fiftieth time the lecture is better than it was the first time. But one of the things I notice about him is that, although he was a scientist, he is not overwhelmed with fact. I have occasion to talk to a great many scientists, and they're always hurling facts into the conversation. I maintain that they stop the conversation. Here is what the doctor says. He says: "All generous minds have a horror of what are commonly called facts. They are the brute beasts of the intellectual domain." He said: "What! Because bread is good and wholesome and necessary and nourishing, shall you thrust a crumb into my windpipe while I am talking?"

*Brown:* Of course, in his case, the assumption is that the fact had already been digested. That is the reason you get so many things made so dull, because the person digests in public and calls that learning. Holmes' learning is profound on the subjects that he has mastered, but the wit is there, too. For example, take him on the question of reputation. He disproves of this, but he says: "How many people live on the reputation of the reputation they might have made."

*Bowen:* Oh, that's wonderful!

*Brown:* "Their whole career is nothing but a broken promise." But his is a fulfilled promise, I believe, in this highly personal form of writing which he brought to a perfection.

*Bowen:* He has something to say about talent in that same connection. There's a great honesty to this man. He says: "I continued for I was in a talking vein. 'As to clever people hating each other, I think a little extra talent does sometimes make people jealous. They become irritated by it. Unpretending mediocrity is good, and genius is glorious, but a weak flavor of genius in an essentially common person is detestable.'" Now, do you think that makes him a snob, Mr. Bryson?

*Bryson*: No, I don't think that makes him a snob, but you asked me that because you know that I think snobbery to be the one slight stain—and it is so slight that it's ungenerous to bring it up about a man that you can love and admire so much. Nevertheless, I do feel sometimes a certain kind of snobbishness in this man, certain kinds of condescension. It's difficult to find a word mild enough, because both snobbishness and condescension seem too strong. But I think he is a little too superior to people who don't speak English the way he thinks Boston English should be spoken; he's a little superior to people whose social position is not as good as his own. Of course, he's also satiric against those who think they are aristocrats because they have money. He's not a simple snob. Maybe he isn't a snob at all. He just seems to me more condescending than he needs to be.

*Brown*: Well, the word snob is certainly used against him by people like Parrington.

*Bryson*: Well, don't put me along with people like Parrington, Mr. Brown. I don't like Parrington!

*Brown*: Well, the point is that he is frequently attacked for being snobbish. That is the common attack. What he actually was was a person brought up in a family of comfort, accustomed to books, accustomed to a certain information, taking it for granted, unfrightened by culture. He was a highly brilliant representative of both Cambridge and Boston in a special period. When he speaks as a snob, however, though that accusation can be made, he is speaking with a kind of honesty that is almost lost. He happens to be intellectually an aristocrat. I personally am so tired of people of the present time who are intellectual aristocrats pretending that they are not that it is a great relief to me to have a man say: this is the kind of person I like; this is the background I respect; and this is the English language as I like to hear it used. I don't think he's a snob. I think that's honesty and truth.

*Bryson*: You make a wonderful defense of him and, if what you said were exactly and precisely true, I'd have to withdraw the accusation. I don't think that quite describes him, but it's ungenerous to push a point like this, even though one has to mention the one flaw in perfection that makes everybody human. As a matter of fact it is slight, and it may be even that it isn't there. It may be that I just think it's there. I'd be willing to say so. I'm sure if he were here, and this were a breakfast table in a Boston boarding house, if all these people that he makes pleasant fun of were sitting around, I think I'd be on his side.

*Bowen*: Well, can you have a person like that who is not something of a snob. Is it not perhaps a little bit attractive? Is it the defect of his quality?

*Bryson*: He's a more attractive person than his son.

*Bowen*: He's a kinder, warmer person, certainly. But wasn't it Dr. Holmes who made up that phrase, "the Brahman caste of New England"? And, you remember, where he wrote of the snobbish people you are describing, "the richer part of the community," as he calls them, he says that there is no such thing as an aristocracy in

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New England as they would have it in old England—he's always comparing old England with America—and he says these people, the Brahmans, have a provoking way of dressing, walking, talking, and nodding to people as if they felt entirely at home. I don't think that any kind of a social snob is really objectionable except the unconscious one and they don't say that they're provoking.

*Bryson:* Well, he's too intelligent, of course, to be unconscious about it.

*Brown:* Of course, he is not only wise but witty, and with that double barrel gift, which is granted to so few people, he is doubly enchanting as a writer. He has been attacked by many people because of his fondness for puns—and we reach into an earlier public debate even to mention the word "puns." I personally delight in his puns. When he refers to the works of Thomas Babington Macaulay, he complains about that super-elegance of style as being too filled with "Macaulay-flowers."

*Bowen:* Well, we can't leave this talk about snobbism without the quotation where he said, "politically I go for equality and socially for the quality." I just maintain that's not snobbism but honesty, as Mr. Brown said.

*Brown:* I would like to say that that is a personal preference. It is what Darwin would have said was just natural selection. On that basis it is honest, just, justifiable, and right.

*Bryson:* Well, since I'm so much on his side in every way, I'm not going to insist on the one thing I don't like about him when both of you resent it so much. I'd like to say something, though, about the man as a man. Isn't it rather extraordinary that one who was a busy general lecturer, a teacher—wasn't he a teacher at a medical school?—and was all his life a great contributor to medical science, could have been at the same time, not so good an essayist, but so busy a one?

*Bowen:* Yes, he had thirteen published books. At least I have thirteen of them on my shelf—poems, essays, three novels. And then, he did start out by being a doctor. Everybody knows his most famous pun, which he wrote on the door of his office: "The smallest fever is gratefully received."

*Brown:* The puns were almost inexhaustible, and the value of his puns, I think, or the value of his writing, is the true sense that comes behind it. For example, his definition of a lawyer, if lawyers will forgive me, seems to me cannot be improved upon. He describes a lawyer as "hirable logic, arguing whatever he wishes or you wish to have him prove"—which is a happy definition and far beyond punning.

*Bryson:* He made quite as much urbane fun of physicians as he did of lawyers and of everybody else. He made fun of pretention wherever he found it. What about the poetry? That can't be neglected.

*Bowen:* I once called him in public, in the preface to a book that I wrote, "The sturdy Yankee who wrote bad verse and good books," and I was rather pleased to get angry letters which all quoted the "Chambered Nautilus," or "The One Horse Shay" or "The Last



Leaf" (which I am very fond of, as a matter of fact). Let us say that the adjective "corn," if that's an adjective—the noun corn—could be applied to his poetry. But it's touching, and it's timely, and when you read it over you find yourself liking it.

*Brown:* Well, I think the poems should be judged by contemporary testimony. As you know, Mrs. Bowen, the poems were written for special occasions as a rule—with high felicity, with great wit, and they were evanescent poems, a great many of them—but everybody says when he read them—and he was, apparently, however small, one of the most enchanting and irresistible of people—with his extraordinary voice and his contagion of personality, they sounded so much better than they do as we read them alone after the passage of time.

*Bryson:* I've been inclined to think, Mr. Brown, that he's the greatest poet sometimes when he's not writing verse at all. That passage, of which I read a small bit, about what people do to you when they are close and know the key to the side door to your spirit, is one of the most deeply moving and poetic things in American prose. It is poetic.

*Brown:* One of the other lovely passages comes when he discusses humorously and seriously Cicero's essay on old age. In the course of this, he describes old age as something that, when you're between fifty and sixty or sixty-five—he says it doesn't matter when it comes by the calendar—keeps calling, leaving its card, year after year; you don't know it's called, and sometime suddenly, if you refuse to receive it, it breaks in the side window and overtakes you.

*Bowen:* And the circumstances of his own death were just exactly right for him. He died reading a book. His head sank down, and he went to sleep in the presence of his son and his daughter-in-law.

*Bryson:* I suppose one of the things you could say about this man is that with this capacity you spoke of, Mrs. Bowen, of being able, by reason of being a natural writer, to express himself, he was a miraculously happy man. Everything about his life seemed to give him a chance to be and do the things he cared most about. And he did them with great power and distinction and beauty and loveliness.

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# ISRAEL ZANGWILL

## *Dreamers of the Ghetto*

LUDWIG LEWISOHN • MAURICE SAMUEL • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I strongly suspect that, if any of our grandfathers had this book of Israel Zangwill on their shelves, they read it. I can remember some of the reading that was done fifty years ago, and Zangwill was a major figure. As a matter of fact, it's astonishing that Zangwill had dropped out of attention as much as he has.

*Lewisohn:* He was a major figure primarily because he was the first in his field. He was the first writer in the English language who took Jewish life and Jewish history as a serious subject.

*Bryson:* You think, Mr. Lewisohn, he is most important as a historical figure, as a pioneer?

*Lewisohn:* I rather think so.

*Samuel:* Well, it's a little bit unjust to him, I think, to say merely "as a pioneer." There are intrinsic merits in him that make him worthwhile for others than students of literature.

*Lewisohn:* Yes, that's true, especially of the book we are discussing. His other books have more or less sunk from sight partly because he shared certain attitudes and emotions with the minor Victorians. But this book has a special vitality. It is still the only book that attempts to grasp, with adequate imaginative power, the whole of Jewish history from the Renaissance until yesterday.

*Bryson:* I think we tend to classify this book along with Zangwill's play, *The Melting Pot*, which was very successful, and the earlier *Children of the Ghetto*, as studies in the lives of immigrant Jewish people in, not the ghettos, but the slums. This book is different from that, isn't it? After all, it starts in Venice, and it ranges all over European history.

*Lewisohn:* Just therein is its greater specific gravity, so to speak.

*Samuel:* In our day, Abram Klein has done this almost better in *The Second Scroll*. The difficulty we have with Zangwill nowadays, I think, stems from the fact that he is more or less of a period piece.

*Bryson:* You mean in style, Mr. Samuel?

*Samuel*: Not in literary style so much as in the style of his thinking, the style of his soul. He was a very odd mixture or, if you will excuse a rather vulgar expression, a schizophrenic. He was a divided person, in the better old phrase; and in that sense he was part of the *fin de siècle* that we used to hear about when we were very young. He was a person who felt that he was both nineteenth and twentieth century, and he dragged into this double identity everything that was in his life. Zangwill's preoccupation with Jewish matters—it was his main preoccupation, not his exclusive preoccupation—also suffered from this division.

*Bryson*: But tension, Mr. Samuel, doesn't generally keep a man from being a great artist; it may even help him. What was wrong with this particular man's division that it didn't make him great, that it just put difficulties in his way?

*Samuel*: Well, tension doesn't make a great artist.

*Bryson*: But it doesn't unmake a great artist.

*Samuel*: I know some people have the impression that if they only have a big enough inferiority complex or a big enough Oedipus complex they can become a Napoleon. But tension isn't the factor which determines a man's size, it determines his style, whether he's a big man or a little man. And Zangwill's style was that of the person who was simultaneously sentimental, because Jewish life made him so, and cynical, because the end of the nineteenth century made him so. The two reacted on each other. His sentimentality became the more saccharine from his cynicism, and his cynicism the more pointed from his sentimentality.

*Lewisohn*: He was a pretty characteristic Victorian nihilist, but the Victorians couldn't take their moral and metaphysical nihilism straight. They had to gild it with noble sentiments, with nostalgia for one thing or another. The great object of his nostalgia was Jewish life in its totality, historic as well as present, but he was always one of the enlightened in the bad sense of the word "enlightenment." So that, in this very volume, when he lets Uriel Acosta say that all evils come from not following right reason and the law of nature, one has a deep-seated suspicion that fundamentally he shares that sentiment.

*Bryson*: And that is the evil of enlightenment?

*Lewisohn*: That is the evil of the enlightenment, Mr. Bryson.

*Bryson*: All evil doesn't come from a failure to follow right reason. Some does.

*Lewisohn*: Some does, yes.

*Bryson*: But that's not a sufficient principle for guiding the whole world.

*Lewisohn*: No. No.

*Bryson*: I represented in my college days the kind of person to whom, I suppose, Zangwill was trying to interpret Jewish life, being not Jewish, being unfamiliar as a youngster with urban life and with the life of people of this kind. But, when I reread the book, I found that a great deal of its magic, the magic of Zangwill, seemed to be gone. I don't suppose this is very strange; the things that I read with

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most interest were exactly what he would probably have said were least important—that is, his not very distinguished sketches of great Jewish figures—people like Lassalle, the Socialist, and Heine, and Spinoza. He doesn't greatly increase your knowledge of those people. I suppose that would be now considered a very unimportant part of his book.

*Samuel:* It's not important, because they hadn't very important Jewish facets. And on the Jewish side, Zangwill was hampered—this was part of this division in him—by the weakness of the intellectual. He was a man who was afraid that he wouldn't be thought sophisticated. And, in order to make it clear that he was sophisticated, he would always hedge on his emotions. This was true not only of his writing but of the whole man and of his life. Take, for example, the role that he played in the movement for the creation of the Jewish State. He began with strong support of Herzl, the founder of the Zionist Movement, and later, when a diversionary movement was set up to transfer the Jewish State to Uganda instead of Palestine, Zangwill quit. In his whole life he showed this ambivalence, as we now say.

*Bryson:* He shows it in the book, Mr. Samuel?

*Samuel:* Yes, he shows it very clearly. If I can take a minute or two, I'll quote two passages, one from his very fine description of the Zionist Congress, called "Dreamers in Congress," and another from the last sketch in the book; characteristic in a closing sketch, "Chad Gadya," in which he speaks of the utter disillusionment of a young modern Jew, who commits suicide out of disillusionment. He begins "The Dreamers in Congress" by saying: "'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.' By the river of Bâle we sit down, resolved to weep no more." And then he goes on: "In the shady courtyard of the Town Hall are sundry frescoes. . . . But, amid these suggestive illustrations of ancient Jewish history, the strangest surely is that of Moses with a Table of the Law, on which are written the words: 'Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'" Now, you think that a man who begins like that is thoroughly imbued with a will and a power. But when he speaks of this hero of his, he has him thinking as follows: "But the Jewish State would not even come. . . . And, even supposing another miraculous link came to add itself to that wonderful chain, the happier Jews of the new State would be born into it as children to an enriched man, unconscious of the struggles, accepting the luxuries, growing big-bellied and narrow-souled. The Temple would be rebuilt. *Et après?* The architect would send in the bill. People would dine and dig one another in the ribs and tell the old smoking-room stories. There would be fashionable dressmakers. The synagogue would persecute those who were larger than it, the professional priests would prate of spiritualities to an applaudive animal world . . ."

*Lewisohn:* Well now, that is part of his own character.

*Bryson:* Both the faith and the disillusionment, Mr. Lewisohn?

*Lewisohn:* There was no faith, there was no real faith. There

was a pretense of faith, and sentimentality, perhaps. Of course, that is a tragic circumstance. A great living philosopher said some years ago that Jewish religion—and it might be said of all religion—is a memory and an aspiration but has no present existence. That describes Zangwill, and it describes his whole emotional and intellectual life. All through even this admirably full and sympathetic account of Jewish history in imaginative terms, there is a slight trivializing and a slight archaizing. He does not, in the deeper sense, believe in the whole thing any longer. And these passages that Mr. Samuel read bear out that attitude.

*Bryson*: If I were inclined to question—which I wouldn't, because of your much greater knowledge and authority—I would say that the one section of this book which does not seem to me to be cursed with that sentimentality or that not quite sincere faith, Mr. Lewisohn, is the piece about the Baal Shem, the great eighteenth century traditional figure, the founder of a new sect of Jewish thought. In describing this simple, prophetic old man, there is a kind of poetic truth which is not quite grasped in other parts of the book. Am I deceived there?

*Lewisohn*: Perhaps you are, by a slight distance from the whole story of The Chassidim. I should say that his feeling is deepest in such stories as "Joseph the Dreamer" and "The Conciliator of Christendom," because it is characteristic of the intellectual Jew of the period of the enlightenment and his living successors to believe in nothing except in a possible world synthesis of the reigning religions. That is about the one sincere hope that he sometimes nurtures.

*Bryson*: And that, you think, is an illusion?

*Lewisohn*: And that, of course, is an illusion.

*Samuel*: You know, I feel a little bit parricidal when I speak about these things. I was brought up on Zangwill. I was brought up on many others, but Zangwill was a dominant figure in the days when I read him. And to treat him as I am doing now makes me a little bit uncomfortable. I'll have to add something more to the confessional on Yom Kippur. I can't help saying that I agree very largely with what has been said, but I'll add this sop to my conscience: that a man who can imitate faith so well as he does in his affirmative descriptions must occasionally have had genuine twinges of it, so to speak. I've often seen men—and I won't drive this parallel too far—of whom you can say, "For a little man to make such a big career he must have very big qualities." For a man to show so much skill in portraying faith, having so little of it himself, something of the real thing must have lodged in him. He did love the Jewish people profoundly, but he didn't know how to love them. He had the impulse; he hadn't the instrumentality. He was, let's say, an unskillful lover who carried on flirtations with others, and out of the muddle you get this feeling of his multiple allegiances. Nevertheless, there was a real man there—and it comes out in his work. It comes out in the passion with which he defends the Jews.

*Bryson*: One can scarcely be a great pioneer, Mr. Samuel, without being a real man in some sense. This is, after all, Jewish Book

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Month, isn't it? And this is a book which is being offered to people by the Jewish Book Council as a book that people ought to read. That's one reason why we're discussing it. There *is* something there. Zangwill doesn't betray the Jewish people in interpreting them. I can say that as a non-Jewish reader. You who know him so much better, and know so much better this faith that we're talking about, may doubt that he has it with the prophetic grasp of some people. But some of it does come with eloquence and moving power to the outsider for whom he's trying to interpret it.

*Samuel*: I would say that the sentimentality was, like his unnecessary sophistication, a concession to the surrounding world. As a sort of protective device he tried to present the Jews as such cute little ginger-bready persons, and to ask how these people could be harmful to anybody and how anybody could possibly entertain wicked thoughts about these lovely old fellows with the long beards and the side whiskers and the people who drink wine at their Passover and have these merry-makings? They're altogether too, too, too charming for anything! Now, such Jews never were on land or sea.

*Lewisohn*: That is an admirable description of the other books—*Children of the Ghetto*, *Ghetto Comedies* and *Ghetto Tragedies*.

*Bryson*: More than of this, you think?

*Lewisohn*: More than of this. In this there are high moments. One of the high moments is when he shows his deep realization of the fact that the reforms introduced by Moses Mendelssohn—the movement toward the West and assimilation to Western culture—immediately bore the dreadful fruit of the apostasy of Mendelssohn's own children. That insight is not steady with him, however. He is very much time-bound and period-bound, as the secondary men of a given period are bound to be. It's only the great figures that transcend their period. Although an immigrant Jew and brought up in Whitechapel and all that, much of this writing is typical Victorian, of the second or even third rate—because Trollope is better than this.

*Bryson*: You mean that your conscience is not touched at all, Mr. Lewisohn?

*Lewisohn*: No. But I wouldn't mind my students at Brandeis today reading this book still. It could be corrected for them in the natural course of things.

*Samuel*: Well, if your students at Brandeis, Mr. Lewisohn, read what most students read, Zangwill would be an improvement under any circumstances. But that isn't exactly soothing to my wounded conscience. I believe that there is a great depth in him, even though his unconscious was more consistently divided even than his conscious. For example, he hardly has one spiritual success in the whole of this book. For him, dreams are things made not to come true. The Turkish Messiah is a failure; Joseph the Dreamer, at the beginning of the book, is a failure; Maimon is a failure; the man at the end of the book commits suicide. You get the deep feeling that this descriptive material comes out of a frustrated and impotent love for the Jewish people. But there was this love, and out of it there also comes a genuine stylistic warmth, sometimes too flashy and sometimes over-

weighted with embroidery and brocade, nevertheless, at all times worth looking at and absorbing for its positive values.

*Bryson*: Wasn't that frustration, Mr. Samuel, the result of his continued belief that a rational approach to the problem of the Jew and an intellectual conciliation of the position between the Jew and the Christian was a solution for all problems?

*Samuel*: Yes, he thought it was a solution, but he didn't place it on the right basis. He placed it on the basis of a loss of character on the part of both to such a degree that there would no longer be any difference between them. Instead of making it a harmony, he wanted to make it a monotone. This was the spiritual frustration.

*Lewisohn*: That melting pot idea was in his mind. It occurs to me at this moment that one of the significant things is that the triumphant person in the book is Spinoza. It is typical of Jews who have reduced their Jewish culture and tradition to a minimum that they are great cultivators of Spinoza, who broke with the Jewish community, broke with the continuity of Jewish culture and tradition and was, in effect, no longer a Jew. You know, all through the enlightenment Spinoza was the great figure. One of the German enlightenment philosophers wrote on Uriel Acosta and on Spinoza and spoke of "the wicked rabbis who threw them out." The rabbis weren't so wicked, you know, as of 1951. They knew what was necessary to preserve people, culture, faith, tradition. But Zangwill is happy about Spinoza, and he sympathizes with Uriel Acosta, who was really no better than he should be—a man whose thought and action was dictated by mere rationalism, this fantastic law of nature.

*Bryson*: And I suppose it's a profound misunderstanding or, at least, an underestimation even of Spinoza to reduce him to the mere geometry of his philosophy. He was a great deal more than mere intellectualist.

*Samuel*: Well, I have the feeling that Spinoza himself suffered from this division and that his so-called purely intellectualized statements were a disguise. The very severity of the form that he adopted was evidence of something that was being suppressed, that couldn't be put into geometric theorems.

*Bryson*: In that case, then, Zangwill traduces Spinoza, because he shows him altogether too willing to give up the other sides of life beyond the elevation of his mind.

*Samuel*: I don't think that Zangwill was either deeply rationalist or deeply the opposite. He wavered. He wasn't a deep understander of Spinoza or a deep understander of the eternal values of the Jewish people. And that he should have written as finely as he did, in spite of these handicaps, is perhaps the measure of a certain type of greatness that we haven't yet acknowledged.

*Lewisohn*: I think that all that we have said is true. And yet I wouldn't like to end on an entirely negative note. I should be glad to give this book to Jewish and non-Jewish students today, and therein evidently lies a value and a memorableness.

*Bryson*: Even though other people have done it perhaps better, the great thing was to do the job when Zangwill did, as well as he did.

# HERBERT SPENCER

## *First Principles*

JUSTUS BUCHLER      •      MASON GROSS      •      LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* I don't doubt at all that "grandfather" had this book, or some other of Spencer's books, on his shelves. It's even possible that he may have read them with some understanding, because Spencer is not impenetrable to the lay reader. But, I'm quite sure that, whether he had the book or not, he thought of Herbert Spencer, seventy-five years ago, as a symbol of somebody who knew everything about everything. Yet today Spencer is almost completely out of print. In a most recently published history of philosophy by one of his compatriots, Mr. Bertrand Russell, he is not even mentioned. His name isn't in the index. In a half century or a little more, a man goes from being almost a worldwide symbol of omniscience into being an almost forgotten trace of something in people's minds.

*Gross:* Well, I think, Mr. Bryson, that we probably want a Herbert Spencer nowadays, whether we can ever get one or not. He's one of those very convenient people who seems to know all the science of his period, seems able to put it in order, state it for you, and cover it all with a kind of a binding principle. In Spencer's case this principle was the law of evolution as he actually developed it. The trouble with that kind of a position, I suppose, is that if you really tie yourself to the science of the period in which you're writing, and you try to be a synthetic philosopher such as Herbert Spencer was, your philosophy may conceivably be so much tied to the science of the period that it has no seminal prospects for new ideas which would carry you on into the next stage.

*Buchler:* Don't you think, Mr. Gross, that the trouble with Spencer was not that he tied himself too closely to the science of his period, but that, in generalizing from the science of his period, he used terms and concepts and ideas which were perhaps too safe, too innocuous? They weren't sufficiently bold and challenging.

*Bryson:* That, Mr. Buchler, seems to me to suggest another as-



pect of him. He did try to be safe, and people don't want philosophers who try to be safe.

*Gross*: Well, he had a new principle for his period—this law of evolution. When he wrote this, evolution was in the air.

*Bryson*: It was only a few years old in its modern form. This is almost contemporaneous with Darwin.

*Gross*: Well, Spencer will tell you that his principles were evolved before Darwin wrote his *Origin of Species*.

*Buchler*: As a matter of fact, he was very much upset to learn that his readers regarded him as a disciple of Darwin. In the second edition of the *First Principles* he calls attention to the fact that his statement of evolution, even as applied to the biological or organic realm, anticipated Darwin's own statement. He even contributed to Darwin the very significant phrase "survival of the fittest," which Darwin used as a synonym for "natural selection" in the last edition of the *Origin of Species*.

*Gross*: Well, I think that this principle of the law of evolution was, to readers of that period, a new principle. But, as we discover in reading through the book, Spencer is such an honest man that he wants to make sure that he's not going beyond the evidence; and the evidence is that which is provided by the scientists, including his own new field of the social sciences. So he qualifies his principle, and he qualifies it until finally, as Mr. Buchler has pointed out, it becomes so general that it could apply to anything. In fact, you begin to suspect that the opposite could be equally true. His principle is watered down, as I suppose any attempt to arrive at one single, all-embracing, general principle must inevitably be watered down.

*Bryson*: If you take something very concrete like the evidence of evolution, which Darwin provided, and you try to philosophize about it in the Spencerian fashion—which is to reduce the concrete to these large, all-embracing general abstract principles—the concrete pretty well falls by the wayside, and there isn't any substance left. You could do that almost equally well about anything, couldn't you?

*Gross*: Yes.

*Bryson*: And isn't it true—let me ask a professional philosopher— isn't it true that the idea that we have come to associate with Darwin is one of the oldest and most firmly planted ideas in Western thought anyway? Darwin didn't invent the idea of evolution.

*Gross*: No, and Spencer points that out. When he talks about *The Origin of Species*, he is providing evidence for one very small realm. He, himself, is going to develop this principle as it applies to all the sciences; and one of the main points that he raises time and time again for the validity of his principle of evolution is that you can find it in all the realms—whether in astronomy, or biology. According to Spencer, it simply cannot be a coincidence that it applies in all those realms. It must be true.

*Buchler*: Spencer intended to apply the evolutionary formula not only to the sciences, but to all of the domains of human experience and to almost every level of existence. As a matter of fact, much of his work is devoted to showing the applicability of the evolutionary prin-

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ciple in the history of art, or in the history of special forms of art like the dance form, or in the evolution of religious rituals, or in the evolution of that which was very dear to the heart of Spencer—the problem of the state.

*Gross*: Perhaps it would be better, just for ourselves, Mr. Bryson, to identify what this principle is.

*Bryson*: We've tossed it around, Mr. Gross. State it, can you?

*Gross*: Well, if you put it in the simplest language, it is: gradual development from a state of what Spencer calls homogeneity to a state of heterogeneity.

*Bryson*: That's not the simplest language yet!

*Gross*: No! No, that's his language, and those are the big words which we're inclined to think stand in his way. It is a development from a stage of, let's say, large-scale monotony, when everything is very much like everything else, to a stage of increasing variety, of variation. He traces the development of variations through the botanical species, through the history of man, through the history of language and, as Mr. Buchler has pointed out, through all the history of art and religion. So, you start with something which is homogeneous, to use his word, something very much alike in all its fundamental aspects, and you arrive at this great variety of forms of art and dance and religion and science and scientific objects that we have nowadays.

*Buchler*: I wonder if it might not be a good idea to pay some attention to Spencer's own version of the formula, which he so felicitously gave. He says himself that evolution is an "integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity." Now, that has a kind of barbaric sound, and Spencer himself realized the somewhat jargonistic character of that formula.

*Gross*: I'm quite sure that when my grandfather got to that stage he yawned.

*Bryson*: But he might have taken a second breath. It might be yawning from nervous excitement; that was a great statement!

*Gross*: It was very comforting.

*Bryson*: Yes, it was comforting. That's true.

*Buchler*: In spite of Spencer's contemporaneous popularity, one of his reviewers rendered this particular formula in the following way: he said, "Evolution is a change from a know-howish, untalkaboutable all-alikeness to a somehowish and in general talkaboutable not-all-alikeness by continuous something-else-ifications and stick-togethernesses."

*Bryson*: That's simply reducing the Latin to good Anglo-Saxon roots, and it comes out pretty well! But a philosopher would be much more likely, would he not, to use the second kind of talking, Mr. Buchler, than the first?

*Buchler*: I think so.

*Bryson*: It's the sociologists who have taken over the kind of writing which Spencer used! Now, I don't think we can ignore the fact that, although Spencer has more or less dropped out of sight

among professional philosophers, there are a great many people alive today, not only our grandfathers, for whom Spencer is a hiring force. A friend of mine told me over the telephone the other day, when he found we were going to discuss this book—and he's a man in his middle forties—that this book was the great revelation to him of confidence in the human intellect. When he read this book, he said, he realized that he could have faith in the power of mind to solve problems. In spite of the fact that Spencer says, "This is knowable, and this is unknowable," my friend felt that Spencer said "this is unknowable" in a way that left no disturbance in your mind. You didn't have to try to know it. He certainly gives you the impression that the mind can finally organize and master the material world and know what to do with it.

*Buchler*: The trouble, Mr. Bryson, with this division of the philosopher's interest into the realm of the unknowable and the knowable is that there are too many difficulties in the notion of the unknowable to suit subsequent philosophers. This is one of the reasons why Spencer passed into eclipse in the twentieth century. First of all, one could ask if there is a realm of the unknowable. How can we know there is such a realm at all? As a matter of fact, a number of philosophers at the turn of the century put that question to Spencer.

*Gross*: Well, Spencer tries to make that clear when he talks about the necessity for a fast principle of all existence. All existence, according to him, must lie outside the realm of existence and, therefore, to an existent being like ourselves, must remain unknown.

*Buchler*: I think the real motivation for Spencer's attempt to divide everything into two realms, the unknowable and the knowable, where evolutionism was the fundamental law of the knowable, was probably his wish to mediate in the raging controversy between religion and science in the late nineteenth century.

*Bryson*: That centered around Darwin more than it did around him.

*Buchler*: Well, it certainly was an effect of Darwinism. Spencer attempted to appease the religionists by trying to say that religion is always left with the very important, the humanly satisfying sense of mystery. Insofar as we depart from mystery, science and philosophy take over, but, insofar as we want to preserve—and so far as it's inevitable that we preserve—the sense of mystery, that's the proper domain of religion.

*Bryson*: Well, what, Mr. Buchler, is his real relation to Darwin? He gave Darwin a term, which has now become identified with Darwin's thinking: "survival of the fittest." He published this book almost simultaneously with *The Origin of Species*. He thought of himself as independent. What is his place in the conflict about the Darwinian views—not only as to the relation between religion and science, but as to the meaning of this survival of the fittest in social affairs and in politics?

*Buchler*: Well, I think Spencer pictured himself not as an anticipator of Darwin's views, but, rather, as a generalizer of Darwin's views.

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*Bryson:* But not of views derived from him?

*Buchler:* No, certainly not. He actually anticipated Darwin's ideas in some respects. He himself said he had been a follower of Lamarck and had subsequently revised his own opinions about the role of natural selection, the role of competition in the biological struggle for existence. I think that he pictured himself primarily as a generalizer of Darwin, as a man who could show that the evolutionary formula was applicable to a great many different domains and not merely to the organic.

*Bryson:* Putting that in biographical terms, Mr. Buchler, he really set out to generalize all the science of his time, didn't he?

*Buchler:* That's what he set out to do.

*Bryson:* And he set out to do that with no backing, almost no university training, not even any money capital—and he made the world like it. It's an extraordinary performance.

*Gross:* It really is an extraordinary performance.

*Bryson:* He didn't even have good health.

*Buchler:* That's right! He says that at the age of thirty-five he had a tremendous nervous collapse which left him, to use his own words, with a lamed brain. It is rather ironic that in 1855, when he acquired what he called this lamed brain, the date coincided with the publication of the *Principles of Psychology*.

*Bryson:* Well, he really set out, as Aristotle perhaps less self-consciously did a couple of millennia before, to generalize all of the knowledge of his time.

*Gross:* He doesn't say so anywhere, but I think we can understand Spencer if we think of him as almost consciously aspiring to be the Aristotle of his period. There had been people like this before. There's nothing new in the appearance of Herbert Spencer. Aristotle, in a sense, had tried to bring together all the science of his time, and the main difference between Aristotle and Spencer was that, at least as far as natural science is concerned, Aristotle did a lot of his own investigating.

*Bryson:* He had Alexander's money and troops to help him.

*Buchler:* Yes, but he was curious himself about the actual phenomena, whereas Spencer was much more curious, it seems to me, as far as natural science is concerned, about the general principles. Then you come to the great disciple of Aristotle, in a sense, St. Thomas Aquinas. Curiously enough, he makes this same division between the knowable and the unknowable and the necessity for getting other sources of information than science for the realm of the unknown.

*Gross:* What interests me is that this whole principle of the law of evolution that Herbert Spencer develops can be traced right back, almost in the form in which we find it in Spencer, to the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher of the early fifth century, B.C., Empedocles, who had the same notion that in this stage in which the world is now living more and more varied forms were developing and that the variation would go on until finally we reached the limit of variation which could be achieved, and then the process would reverse itself. Instead of having variation, you would gradually have things growing more

and more like each other until you finally got to a completely monotonous or completely homogeneous universe; and then it would start all over again.

*Bryson*: That makes the idea of progress a little bit doubtful, doesn't it, Mr. Gross?

*Gross*: Well, there's something very curious about that. One thing I like about Spencer, which contrasts him with some people of the Victorian period, is that, although he does believe that this evolution is progress from our point of view, he tries very hard to keep human values out of it. In other words, he doesn't say over and over again that evolution is good, that we're in the right direction. He does at times, but he seems to be trying to correct himself and not make these moral judgments.

*Buchler*: Spencer deliberately avoided the use of the term "progress" in *First Principles*. In his earlier writing he actually made "progress" and "evolution" synonymous, but he says in his autobiography he became more and more doubtful of the rationality of mankind and began to feel that progress and evolution were not very satisfactory synonyms.

*Gross*: This is one reason, though Spencer wobbles on this point, why the grandfather we talked about might have been comforted by this book. Spencer tells us, for example, that we can draw from this general study a warrant for the belief that evolution can end only in the establishment of the greatest perfection and the most complete happiness. Now, there is optimism for you.

*Buchler*: But I don't think that we credit Spencer with a sufficient amount of self-conscious doubt. For every passage of that sort we can find a parallel passage which emphasizes to us that even the term "progress" ought not to be applied merely to that process in which human betterment eventuates. Spencer actually says that to understand progress aright we must learn the nature of these changes, "considered *apart* from our interests."

*Bryson*: Doesn't that, Mr. Buchler, get us back without too much difficulty to this point about his relation to the "social Darwinism" of his time? After all, the latter half of the nineteenth century was a time in which men believed pretty confidently many things which we have discarded today. They believed that the state does not need to intervene, or, even though people might want the state to intervene for the welfare of individuals, on the whole it's better that the state shouldn't do so.

*Buchler*: Yes! I think, Mr. Bryson, that the reason why Spencer felt it undesirable for the state to intervene was not that, if it didn't intervene, competition would be for the best and the best-of-all-possible-worlds, but, rather, that evolution was a kind of ruthless process, and that it was better that individualistic competition should take its own course than that the state, with its inevitable bureaucratic interests, should intervene and make matters worse. Perhaps contrary to what Mr. Gross suggested, I think that Spencer is not so much of an optimist as a kind of realistic spectator of contemporary social and political developments, and that he felt that the matter of social com-

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petition, the matter of individualistic struggle, was something that was a necessary evil and not something that was a part of the best of all possible worlds.

*Gross*: I think you're perfectly right, Mr. Buchler. Of course, it wasn't my suggestion. I was quoting Spencer.

*Bryson*: He's a little ambivalent!

*Gross*: Well, he is, of course, but that's a characteristic of the period again. Scientists *always* want to keep away from these value judgments, and Spencer has a real feeling for that. But I wonder very much, for example, which came first. In view of the fact that we have here a man who is trying to demonstrate the law of evolution as applying to *all* types of phenomena, which came first? In other words, does his feeling that the individual must develop, and that the state must keep out of it, lead him to his interpretation of the law of homogeneity and heterogeneity or does the law compel his conclusion? After all, heterogeneity seems to put greater and greater stress upon the development of the individual as against any way of treating individuals en masse.

*Buchler*: I think, Mr. Gross, that it could place emphasis on the development of anything at all. The trouble with the ideas of homogeneity and heterogeneity is their inherent vagueness. It seems to me that, if one wants to speak of the homogeneous, one has to say, "homogeneous in such-and-such a respect," or "heterogeneous in such-and-such a respect"; and this is what I meant originally by suggesting that Spencer's categories were too safe. They were vague enough to apply to almost anything.

*Bryson*: But, in his sociological writings ideas that derived out of this were more concrete. After all, he was a great pioneer in what today we call social science; and he would quite definitely have been considered on the side of the anti-state or anti-stateism. He couldn't possibly have been a philosopher of the British Labor Party, could he?

*Buchler*: Certainly not! As a matter of fact, those who are alarmed by the tendencies of the "welfare state" can find in Herbert Spencer an apology for individualism that is as apropos and as complete as any statement current today.

*Gross*: There again you begin to wonder: is that a deduction? For example, a lot of people feel that way about individualism, and a philosopher is supposed to find some greater justification for it than merely the individual feeling. Now, if Herbert Spencer grounds that idea in his law of evolution, or in this general principle of the change from homogeneity to heterogeneity, has he really provided any kind of an argument? I raise this point as a matter of philosophical interest entirely, because his own principles here are so weak and so general that his arguments, if they're deduced from it as he would like to have them deduced from it, have no more validity than the vague general principle from which he deduces them.

*Buchler*: Well, Mr. Gross, the surprising thing is that we keep burying Herbert Spencer today; and one becomes rather suspicious why we have to bury him so often.

*Bryson*: He won't stay down!

*Buchler*: He won't stay down. Just as every philosopher casts a net into the sea, Spencer casts his net into a very deep sea, and, while his net was not very subtle, it caught the big fish. That helps to account partly for the way people still feel they have to refute Herbert Spencer as excessively mechanical.

*Bryson*: What Mr. Buchler appears to be saying, Mr. Gross, is that the reputation of Spencer, although it's very low now, is only in a trough, and we can expect it to rise again. On the other hand, it might be that Herbert Spencer's influence would be lost implicitly and anonymously in a lot of modern thought.

*Gross*: Oh, I think there's no doubt about the fact that Herbert Spencer influenced a great many people and had enormous prestige. You find echoes of Spencer in a lot of contemporary philosophers. Nevertheless, I don't feel he's in a trough. I think he's dead. I think that his generality is so great that you simply can't make any use of it. He may have had insights which are always valuable—and may be the most valuable thing in any philosopher—but, systematically speaking, he's not in a trough; he's dead.

*Buchler*: He certainly is not dead insofar as he is a genuine precursor of many of the developments in the social sciences. Social scientists have a great deal to learn from Spencer today.

*Bryson*: I suppose you might agree, gentlemen, that it is astonishing and ironic that a man who, by his own efforts, made himself a worldwide symbol of omniscience is now merely thanked for being somebody else's ancestor.

# GUY de MAUPASSANT

## Short Stories

CLIFTON FADIMAN • MARK VAN DOREN • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* There are parts of the United States where, if one's grandfather had had Maupassant on his shelves, he would have had the book behind the other books so that, if grandmother or one of his great aunts happened to drop in, they wouldn't notice that he had it.

*Fadiman:* That's certainly true. As a matter of fact, Mr. Bryson, my father had those books, together with other books of supposedly questionable nature, in a special bookcase behind a thick glass door.

*Bryson:* Locked, Mr. Fadiman?

*Fadiman:* Oh, locked! You had to steal the key before you could read them. Well, of course, I had read them all by the time I was about twelve, and was very glad to reread them now that I'm considerably more than twelve. It is true, of course, that Maupassant has had a kind of underground reputation for many years. Oh, twenty years or so ago you'd find the short stories of de Maupassant sold in drug stores at a dollar-forty-nine, the implication being that he wasn't a real author, but a naughty Frenchman. Even today you occasionally see advertisements selling these stories of deMaupassant, showing half-clad ladies as typical heroines, and so forth.

*Bryson:* It would be difficult now, Mr. Fadiman, to buy a book of any kind that doesn't have a half-clad lady on the cover.

*Fadiman:* But, these are *French* half-clad ladies! I do think it's perhaps time to retrieve poor Maupassant from this Limbo.

*Van Doren:* I certainly agree with you, Mr. Fadiman! I might say, in the first place, that more living authors than would admit it might like to be found in drug stores. All authors really want to be read widely, and only certain ones can pretend otherwise. I too want to retrieve Maupassant from this limited reputation. I must confess I wasn't quite so distinctly aware of it as you are, although I do recognize what you mean. To me, de Maupassant is a great writer. Great writers are found in drug stores, too.



*Bryson*: And he is not, Mr. Van Doren, a great writer whose greatness is particularly concerned with being, shall we say, pornographic.

*Van Doren*: Oh, he's the last thing from pornographic.

*Bryson*: As a matter of fact, the drug stores were misleading people when they sold him as "under the counter pornography."

*Fadiman*: But don't you think we should make it clear right at the outset that the main subject of de Maupassant's work is the relations between the sexes? De Maupassant was obsessed by the way in which men and women acted toward each other. But his viewpoint was not pornographic, leering, or gloating.

*Bryson*: Before we go into that, Mr. Fadiman, I would like to touch upon what seems to me another misunderstanding. In the textbooks of short stories which Mr. Van Doren and the other teachers hand out to youngsters—I don't know whether you do, Mr. Van Doren . . .

*Van Doren*: No, I do not! I do not!

*Bryson*: But many teachers of English literature do. In these textbooks there are three or four brief, well-constructed, neat little stories by Maupassant, which give the growing student the idea that he is a sort of French O'Henry.

*Van Doren*: Yes!

*Bryson*: Now, that also is a misunderstanding.

*Fadiman*: I think it is. That's the second of the misunderstandings of Maupassant. It's said that he invented the well-constructed story with the surprise ending. But that's true of only a few stories, notably "The Necklace," one of his dullest tales; not a bad one, just a dull one. Actually, Maupassant is not a writer of well-constructed stories. But he throws at you a fresh slice of life, all bleeding. He's not a finicky or even a careful writer. What do you say, Mr. Van Doren?

*Van Doren*: He's a great writer and not a neat writer. I suppose great writers are never neat. The thing that keeps him from being what we first said some people thought he was, namely, pornographic, is that he's always passionate. His interest, to be sure, is in men and women and in their relations, but, as you yourself said, Mr. Fadiman, it's not a lecherous interest in that subject. It's an interest in that subject as a subject which contains most of the facts of human life.

*Fadiman*: Yes!

*Van Doren*: And his interest in love—I would say love rather than sex, although, of course, it is very hard to separate the two—is so enormous and so full and rich and full-blooded that it extends to almost all the reaches of the subject—to the consequences, to the pities, to the ironies, to the sometimes grotesque.

*Bryson*: He is concerned with what passion does to people's lives, not merely with passion as an end in itself.

*Fadiman*: That's right!

*Bryson*: Almost never is a passionate act the culmination of a story.

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*Fadiman*: And he's just as much interested in the passion of love as it sways two old people or two ugly people as he is when it sways two beautiful people. In other words, he's not gloating over the spectacle of sexuality at all.

*Bryson*: Not at all! No, he doesn't gloat over anything. Of course, in the books on the subject, he's always spoken of as a naturalist, as a pupil of Flaubert. And he is supposed to have given us life in the raw. But doesn't that imply a lack of feeling, a lack of pity? On the contrary, he's deeply pitiful of the people he writes about.

*Fadiman*: Yes, Flaubert is supposed to have been proud of the fact that he didn't take sides, that he didn't enter into the situation or seem to sympathize with one party more than another. Whereas de Maupassant, I think, often sympathizes, always declares himself, if not in so many words. One of the finest of his stories is the rather long one called, "Boule de Suif." You remember that, Mr. Van Doren?

*Van Doren*: Yes!

*Fadiman*: How would you translate that?

*Van Doren*: It's translated "ball of fat" or "tallow ball" or something of that sort.

*Bryson*: Well, "tallow ball" isn't right because it really means that this was a fat girl.

*Fadiman*: Yes!

*Bryson*: It was her nickname.

*Fadiman*: Well, this fat girl, this lady of pleasure (that being her business), is traveling during the time of the Franco-Prussian War along in the same carriage with a group of aristocratic, or upper middle-class, Frenchmen. In order to save the party from insult or danger she is supposed to yield herself to a German officer.

*Bryson*: Which she doesn't want to do!

*Fadiman*: Which she doesn't want to do because of an inner nobility in her, despite what may seem to be the baseness of her profession. Now, it's perfectly clear that Maupassant is on the side of this lady-of-pleasure and against the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, these hypocritical, essentially selfish people.

*Bryson*: Yes, because she hates the Germans quite as much as they do.

*Fadiman*: She's a true patriot.

*Bryson*: And after she has sacrificed herself in order to get the party over the frontier, they despise her for it. Actually, it seems to me that in that story, which is, of course, one of his greatest and best-known, Maupassant hates the French bourgeoisie almost as much as he hates the Prussian soldiers.

*Van Doren*: Incidentally, that's his first short story. Did you realize that?

*Bryson*: The first one that was published.

*Van Doren*: The first one. And it is just as finished as the last one. I don't want to suggest that he ran down from that point on, but he never found a richer story and never told one. You know,

there's the famous account of his having gone to school to Flaubert, his elder, and of how Flaubert held him back and made him study and made him practice. One day, not too long before Flaubert died, Maupassant took this story to him and said: "How's this?" Flaubert read it and said: "It's perfect," which it is. So Maupassant published it and, then, it was as if a dam had burst, and Flaubert—to me a rather cold and distinctly inferior artist, although he's awfully good—Flaubert's influence, his rather dead hand, was removed, and Maupassant went wild, doubtless too wild. He wrote too many stories. I happen to admire more than anything else, I think, fecundity in authors, and the prolific. You usually find that great writers were prolific, the way great painters are, the way great persons are. They have too much of everything—and some of it is bad, to be sure. Maupassant's fecundity of output is connected with a view of the world he has. To him the world is a fecund thing, also nature is always giving birth.

*Bryson*: That's part of his obsession with passion. That's part of the fecundity of the earth.

*Fadiman*: But for him nature is passionate. You probably remember his many descriptions of trees, grass, water, clouds, as being in love with one another. He was obsessed by life in its germinative aspects rather than its esthetic ones. When he describes a wood, a tree, or a flower, it's never the way an artist would describe it, but always as if all he were interested in was growth, multiplication, germination. This gives his stories their essential hallmark, energy. Here's a man of incredible energy, some of it, as Mr. Van Doren indicated, misapplied, because many of his stories are cheap and trivial little anecdotes.

*Bryson*: But he had to write, Mr. Fadiman! He wrote for newspapers and for cheap magazines. He wrote for a few pennies, really.

*Fadiman*: I'm not saying he shouldn't have done that.

*Bryson*: No! No! I know! But that accounts for some of the bad things. It seems to me that there's a great deal more than Flaubert in Maupassant. There's a good deal of Balzac in Maupassant because Balzac had that same feeling for the depth of passion and energy in the world. His characters are always over-energetic; and you get that same feeling out of Maupassant.

*Van Doren*: I wonder if some of this energy may not come from his ancestry? He was a Norman, and many of his best stories are about the peasants and the middle-classes of Normandy. Normans, according to Maupassant, are exceptionally strong. They are vigorous even in their tiny passions. When they're misers they're terrific misers. They're excessive people with a long tradition of strength.

*Fadiman*: Yes! The popular notion of the Frenchman, which still prevails, is that of a weak, thin, pale fellow.

*Bryson*: With a wax moustache!

*Fadiman*: One reason I admire Maupassant is that he destroys this notion. His Norman peasants are burly and hard.

*Bryson*: They had moustaches, but they're bushy!

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*Fadiman*: And they're given to passions of extreme violence.

*Van Doren*: Yes!

*Bryson*: As he was!

*Fadiman*: Now, this energy, this fecundity, this almost tornado-like power of Maupassant was not inconsistent with a great delicacy either.

*Van Doren*: As a matter of fact, you find delicacy only in very strong persons. I mean true delicacy.

*Fadiman*: Could you give us an example of that?

*Van Doren*: Well, one is tempted to remember all sorts of stories. There is a swarm of them, and probably we don't all have the same memory of them. But there's a little story, quite short, less than ten pages, I think, called "Martin's Girl," about a peasant—again, I believe, a Norman peasant—who just quietly, and sort of helplessly, fell in love with a neighbor girl, the daughter of another peasant, and wanted to marry her. But it turned out that she didn't marry him and we don't quite know why. She married somebody else. Well, he continued to be in love with her, and a year or so after her marriage he happened to be passing her house one morning and heard screams coming from the house. It seems that she was alone in the house. Her husband was away, and there was no doctor or midwife available, and she was having her first baby by herself. He goes in and helps her, and it's not a very agreeable experience.

*Bryson*: And he was quite inexperienced in this sort of thing.

*Van Doren*: That scene is one of the most moving, one of the most heartrending scenes I know.

*Bryson*: It's almost too much to take.

*Van Doren*: Because he hadn't wanted to have this kind of relation. It wasn't even his child. Well, he helps her and then goes away. Then the father returns, and it's understood what the part of all three persons had been, and our hero is not in love with the girl again quite in the way that he had been.

*Fadiman*: Yes, he's passed through an experience so much greater than or so much different from the experience of love, that it's purged him of it, as it were.

*Van Doren*: That's right!

*Fadiman*: I can remember another one. I think of this story almost as the ancestor of all the stories of frustration that we meet in the Russians, and in our own day, too. It's the story of the sixty-year-old clerk, a little Paris functionary, who has done the same thing every day for all of his adult life—gone to the office, had his little luncheon, his little dinner, gone back to his home, gone to sleep, up again, done the same thing for fifty years or so. He's walking down the *Bois* in Paris one spring afternoon at about five o'clock. The avenue is full of carriages bearing young men and women in love, embracing each other. The perfume of the women floats back to his nostrils, and he feels somehow that he's missed something, all of a sudden, and doesn't know quite what it is. (He's a bachelor, of course.) He wanders to the outskirts of Paris where there's a wood. There, too, lovers are congregated. He hears their murmurs, their

sighs; he breathes the perfumed air of the wood and the enchantment of Paris in the spring. And that is all there is to the story, except that the next day the police find him, hanging to a tree. He has hanged himself with his own suspenders.

*Bryson*: Of course, it's that sort of thing, you know, Mr. Fadiman, that makes people call him brutal.

*Fadiman*: Ah, but it isn't! It's compassion. He isn't brutal. His stories often deal with sad, tragic, and violent events, but he never, it seems to me, narrates them for the purpose of enjoying the tragedy—and that's what brutality is.

*Bryson*: But in that sense he's the true naturalist. He tells the things as he thinks they are, not to enjoy them.

*Van Doren*: He has a good many stories, Mr. Fadiman, dealing with the small clerks in government offices who live insufferably dull lives, lives of routine. He himself had that life in so far as he had to work for a living. He worked in a government office and knew the functionaries from "A" to "Z," but his exposure of that dullness is never triumphant, is never superior.

*Fadiman*: No, it's sad, if anything.

*Van Doren*: It's sad, and sometimes there is a relish of life's small humors, because some of his clerks play little practical jokes on one another. Do you remember in one story how one of them is always upsetting, or seeming to upset, a bottle of ink on the other's papers? But it's a trick; it isn't really a bottle of ink. They have these little jokes day by day and talk about them on the suburban trains going home. I like him very much for his managing to avoid the bitterness, which we often get in satires upon this subject.

*Fadiman*: That's a part of life, too.

*Bryson*: But he's never really satirical, Mr. Van Doren. And he's not dull.

*Van Doren*: No, I think he's always above satire.

*Bryson*: But he shows the frustrations of the clerks, and I think he does, after all, have a scale of values. He's not over and above thinking this is good and that's bad. And he prefers his peasants to his clerks.

*Fadiman*: And that's why, Mr. Bryson, I would refuse to apply the word "naturalist" to him.

*Bryson*: In the ordinary sense, I agree. In so far as "naturalist" means a writer of fiction who doesn't care what is true, or what isn't and what is good, and what is bad, Maupassant is not one, because he has fierce loyalties to the good, fierce loyalties to classes, and fierce loyalties to sections, as in the case of the Normans.

*Van Doren*: But I think he's called brutal often partly because he is not obsessed, but deeply interested in, the passions which seem to burst out of people, the volcanic passions.

*Fadiman*: Yes, they're not subtle. All of the energies of the people are raw and naked energies. But that's merely the side of life that happened to hit him hard. When you read, for example, about Proust's men and women in love, you seem to be reading about a different passion entirely. The passion of love in Maupassant is raw.

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It is naked. It is frankly and unashamedly sensual. It is not complicated. All his people seem to love in much the same way, usually obsessively, for a short time.

*Bryson*: He is not complicated, Mr. Fadiman. He writes about these volcanic changes, sudden and dramatic shifts in character. One of my favorite stories is that which he calls *La Mère Sauvage*, or "The Savage Mother," the woman who had a son away at the Franco-Prussian War. He wrote a lot of stories about the Franco-Prussian War.

*Fadiman*: Yes, he hated the Germans.

*Bryson*: He did, indeed! Her son is away at war, and she's taking care of three or four German boys. They're pink-cheeked, and she's taking good care of them. When she finds out her son has been killed, she locks them in the loft of her barn and burns them to death. This person who had been so kind and sweet to these boys, because they reminded her of her own boy, when she hears that her own boy is dead, turns into an avenger. Now, that sudden, dramatic change is so typical of Maupassant. It isn't brutal, but it's dramatic in the most explosive way. It's volcanic.

*Fadiman*: He's a writer about violent things, but that doesn't make him brutal.

*Bryson*: No, it doesn't. I quite agree!

*Van Doren*: You can't help being amused, or, at least I can't, by the relish that he seems to take in having the Germans come out badly in those years following the Franco-Prussian War. Do you remember? He has them buried in a manure pile, has them run through with pitchforks.

*Fadiman*: Yes, he certainly does hate them.

*Bryson*: Well, after all, he lived through the defeat of France, which was a pretty terrible thing for a man as deeply patriotic as he was and whose ideal of France was not merely civilization but also strength.

*Fadiman*: There again, Mr. Bryson, he ceases to be a naturalist at the point where he's patriotic. A naturalist has no feeling for country or he shouldn't. Maupassant is simple, obvious, and moral, which I suspect any writer who wants to live has to be.

*Bryson*: Simple, obvious, and moral! Sounds like the triad of great writers.

*Fadiman*: Well, that's why I think he is a great writer. He isn't an artist in the sense of being a continuously refining artist. For example, all of his characters talk in about the same way. There's no attempt at giving the illusion of realistic dialogue. His peasants use the same kind of phrasing that his aristocrats do, and it doesn't seem to matter at all. The impact of the story is so great, and the energies and emotions of his characters are so clear, irrespective of the language they use, that you don't ask for the surface realism for which he is often praised. Actually, he's not a surface realist at all. He writes in conventional form. The people talk a kind of conventional, correct French.

*Van Doren*: Yes, and they speak always in short, very efficient sentences.

*Fadiman*: Like machinegun bullets.

*Bryson*: But they carry the story on.

*Fadiman*: Yes, sentences always further the story. Maupassant always had a story to tell, which isn't always true of short story writers. They would like to have one and they begin with a gesture, a situation, a mood or what-not, and hope that the story will emerge. Nine times out of ten it doesn't. But you know when Maupassant begins that he already has a story in mind. He's quite willing to let you have it all in the first paragraph.

*Van Doren*: Yes, and he also does a thing that the modern writer so rarely does and that is actually to be so old-fashioned as to begin at the beginning, go on in the middle, and end at the end, instead of beginning in the middle or something of that sort.

*Fadiman*: Is he lacking in humor? Sometimes it seems to me that that's the only quality that is missing.

*Bryson*: I don't think he has very much humor.

*Fadiman*: He has a kind of coarse enjoyment of people's misadventures at times.

*Bryson*: But there are some stories, which we wouldn't have time now to tell, which I think are quite funny. And they are only part of an astonishing output for a man who had about ten years of a not-very-well-spent life to write.

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# ROBERT BROWNING

## The Ring and the Book

ROBERT HILLYER • VIRGILIA PETERSON • LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* Whether our grandfathers read poetry or not, I'm sure that Robert Browning's name must have rung about their ears a good deal of his time, because in grandfather's day Robert Browning was probably talked about more than any other British poet. Sometimes he was talked about more than read. By the time he wrote *The Ring and the Book* he was as successful as he ever was. *The Ring and the Book* is, in a way, a sign of that confidence and mastery that the poet finally attained.

*Hillyer:* I think it is, Mr. Bryson. It came out in 1869, in four volumes—and it takes a bold poet to publish so long a work. It's a murder story, really—simply a murder story—divided into twelve parts.

*Bryson:* But it is not, Mr. Hillyer, a murder story in a modern fashion. The reader knows, right at the start who did the murder, and almost why. It's the "why" that make the poem.

*Hillyer:* The whole story is told in the very first section. All the facts are given you, and then the rest of the poem concerns the development of the individuals involved. Each part is a retelling of the story from the point of view of each individual involved. That, I think, is the original scheme.

*Bryson:* And by an almost unfair trick of plotting his story, Mr. Browning even has the chief victim tell her story before she dies.

*Peterson:* Well, he begins with the reaction of the public. After Mr. Browning has told what the story is about, in the introduction which is called "The Ring and the Book," he then goes on to "Half Rome"—half Rome being on the side of the murderer.

*Bryson:* And the murderer is the murdered lady's husband.

*Peterson:* The husband. The next part is about "The Other Half" of Rome on the side of the wife, the victim of the murder—one of the victims, because her parents were also murdered in one fell,



foul deed in the middle of the night. Then Browning goes on with the characters.

*Bryson*: And isn't it important, to get the flavor of this thing, Miss Peterson, to add that this murder actually happened? It happened in 1698 in Rome, and was a very famous case. Browning took something out of the police annals of the seventeenth century in Rome and made this great poem of it.

*Peterson*: He found a little old yellow book in Florence, in the book stores, and bought it for a few pence. It took him a long time, I believe, to realize what he could make by blowing his own imagination through it.

*Hillyer*: I think we ought to establish the names of the characters, don't you?

*Bryson*: If it's possible to remember them!

*Hillyer*: The main ones are Count Guido Franceschini, who married Pompilia Comparini. They were married four years, weren't they? She was only thirteen at the beginning, I believe.

*Bryson*: She died just after her seventeenth birthday.

*Hillyer*: And she lingered on four days after the attack.

*Peterson*: It was just after her seventeenth birthday, and two weeks after the birth of her son, who survives this whole drama by virtue of having been removed to an old lady in the country.

*Hillyer*: It was a tragic and pathetic life, wasn't it?

*Peterson*: Terrible!

*Bryson*: But your roster of characters had better go on, Mr. Hillyer. There is Guido, the husband; Pompilia, the wife, and Caponsacchi, the priest who helped the wife get away from the husband and from a life which she thought intolerable. That's why the husband killed her, because she ran away—at least that's what he said, and what the Pope said.

*Hillyer*: The Pope came into the picture because the Count had taken minor orders and, therefore, could appeal to the Church for respite from death.

*Bryson*: That was after he admitted the crime. He made no attempt to conceal the fact that he had killed his runaway girl-bride two weeks after the birth of their child, and that he had killed her parents.

*Peterson*: First of all, though, the bride ran away with the priest, after four years of misery.

*Bryson*: So she says.

*Peterson*: So she says. And Count Guido ran after them and caught them before they reached Rome, which would have been a safe place, since the Count could not have done anything to them there. Then the Count submitted to an ordinary legal trial. And in that first trial, Pompilia was sent to a convent, where women who had done a certain amount of evil were sent, to be walled away and prayed for and worked upon spiritually. Caponsacchi, the priest, was exiled for three years as his punishment, outside of Rome in a small village somewhere in Italy. The Count then went back to his home, which was in Arezzo, in Tuscany, and not in Rome. It was there, then, that

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his friends began to work upon him, and he began to be made to feel that he had lacked the courage to defend his honor at the moment.

*Bryson*: So he said.

*Peterson*: So he said. That was the basis of his justification. All these characters, needless to say, go in for a lot of justification and self-excuse, as is the wont of human nature.

*Bryson*: Well, that's the reason for my rude interruptions, Miss Peterson—"so he said" and "so she said." After all, the poem is made up of the characters trying to justify the way they behave. Each poem, each of the twelve sections, is either a defense of somebody by an outsider, or it's a defense of somebody by himself—except that Guido, of course, is given two sections—one in which you see him as the outraged husband, and one in which you see him as a man frightened of his life, because he knows he's going to be executed—and by that time he's gone completely out of his mind.

*Hillyer*: Yes. He felt that he had a double grievance, first, because Pompilia was not really the daughter of these people, Pietro and Violante, who had a modest sum which would have come to the Count at their death had she been their daughter. She was a foundling. This pathetic old woman had palmed her off as her own child because she was childless, and because the principal of this money would thereby come to her.

*Bryson*: That's part of the great complication of the story which is used by Guido as an excuse for his final murderous resolution of his honor. But it seems to me that we aren't conveying why this is a great poem. It isn't just an intricate discussion of people's characters. What made it such a tremendous experience for the people who first read it, as it is now, when you re-read it? I re-read it, and, of all grandfather's bookshelf, this is one of those that gave me the most sense of rediscovery.

*Peterson*: It has such stature, I think, because the main purpose of Browning throughout *The Ring and the Book* was to deal with the difficulty in finding the truth in any situation. That seems to be the kernel of the book, and, of course, that is one of the major ideas in human life, the search for the truth. And in this book, the conclusion is that the truth exists in the maze of self-deceit and casuistry with which each person defends his own position; the truth lies somewhere in between. It is the finding of the truth and the absolute standard of good and evil, which is so satisfying—aside from the brilliance of the verse and the analysis.

*Bryson*: Isn't that the important point, Miss Peterson, that, in spite of the attempt to find the truth in the maze of motives, there is still in all these people a strong sense of what is good and what is evil. There is no doubt in their minds of that.

*Hillyer*: It seems to me it is the problem of good and evil, Mr. Bryson, all through *The Ring and the Book*. And, if we were to look for the pattern of the nearest good, since this is all done from the point of view of different characters and the analysis of different characters, I think we'd take the figure of Pope Innocent XII, who finally

presided over the trial and made the decision. I think we'd take him as the nearest to the pattern of good.

*Bryson*: Oh, he's the greatest thing in the book, but it's very difficult to explain why.

*Peterson*: Well, he himself says, in the verse that Browning puts into his mouth, that the choice between good and evil is the business of life. He puts it right there. The reason that the Pope comes out in stature far above the others is probably the grand wisdom of the octogenarian, expressed in very powerful verse, and his perception, his understanding of human weakness and human evil, and his continual maintaining of shining, radiant goodness as a standard against which they measure it. His is head and shoulders, I believe, above the other sections of *The Ring and the Book* because of that.

*Bryson*: Would it be so striking, Miss Peterson, if it weren't for the fact that in the others—all of them, even little Pompilia—you have this sense of passionately involved little people who are so torn and so driven by their own passions that the Pope's aloofness and wisdom is given the proper background in which to shine.

*Peterson*: Of course.

*Hillyer*: And in poor little Pompilia's case, Mr. Bryson, it wasn't really passion as we understand it; it was simply a flight from misery, complete, abject misery, wasn't it? One's conclusion is that Pompilia was, if not a saint, at any rate very saintly. She was the model of pure girlhood, and she suffered great abuse at the hands of the Count. Isn't that unquestionable?

*Peterson*: It's been said that Browning may have overdone the radiant, sentimental sweetness of Pompilia in an effort to make another tribute to his dead wife, who had been gone for some six years, but whom he had, of course, not forgotten for a moment. He made Pompilia into a kind of effigy, and he's been accused of changing the contents of the old yellow book and blowing up the character of Caponsacchi, too, into a more noble and virtuous character than he may have been in the actual incident in 1698.

*Bryson*: It's one of the most surprising things about Browning, that this poet, who is often so crabbed and obscure and difficult, rises to a kind of simple lyricism whenever he's talking about love. He's a great poet of love. Even the strangers, the gossips . . . look at the way the other Half Rome, the half of Rome that's on the side against the husband speaks:

Another day that finds her living yet,  
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow  
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,  
And, under the white hospital array,  
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise  
You'd think, yet now stabbed through and through again,  
Alive i' the ruins. . . ."

He doesn't talk like that, ever, except when he talks about love.

*Peterson*: He's very tender.

*Hillyer*: And did you notice how, in the book devoted to Pompilia, the vocabulary becomes simple, and the blank verse itself be-

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comes much more limpid? It hasn't that quick, sometimes harsh, sometimes cynical ring that the blank verse of, for example, one of the books on Rome's Opinion would have.

*Bryson*: Well, one of the most remarkable things about Browning, for which he almost never gets credit, is that he is a very great dramatic poet in the sense that—I would defer to your opinion here, Mr. Hillyer—the very movement of his verse changes with the characters, much more than in some of the greater poets.

*Hillyer*: That is true of *The Ring and the Book* most of all in Browning, I think.

*Peterson*: He's been accused of lumpy and gritty erudition and of garrulous pedantry in other poems—and I must say there is something in the accusation. But in this you find very little, except perhaps in the two lawyers. The prosecuting and defending attorneys, each one, have chapters to themselves and, with their nasty shrewdness and absolute indifference to the justice of the question at hand, they go over the speeches they're going to make to try and beat each other at the trial. There's a lot of Latin thrown in, which is really just for obscurantism's sake, and all this makes rather difficult reading. This section hasn't that clean line of emotion that the rest of the poem has.

*Bryson*: What about this fellow Guido, anyway? He married a thirteen-year-old girl; he lived with her four years; she ran away with a priest who was trying to help her. After he had once allowed that to happen and accepted the result, then he got furious and hired a couple of bravos from his own estate and went and killed her and her parents, about Christmas-time. What kind of a man is it anyway who does all this?

*Hillyer*: My first conclusion was that he was evil incarnate. But, when I considered one of the minor characters, a very wicked one, his brother, the decayed churchman, then Guido seemed grey in comparison, because the brother is much worse. Guido was the embodiment of pride, false pride, dynastic pride; it was an error of his time. And even the hero, if we can call him that, Caponsacchi, had some dynastic pride, pride in family. That and cruelty and greed seemed to me the chief qualities in the Count.

*Peterson*: It's necessary to keep in mind that Guido didn't marry through love. He was well on in years—forty odd—when he married this thirteen-year-old child, after his brother had found out that she was supposed to inherit a certain sum of money. He simply searched for a wife and, being poor, although of a great name, he searched in what would then be called, I suppose, the lower middle-classes for this wife. It wasn't a love arrangement at all. And yet, after the marriage, the fact that she could not love him because he treated her so badly ate into his soul like wormwood, and he became a victim also of sexual frustration. I would like to say here that I think Browning is really a great psycho-analyst and differs from our modern psycho-analysts not in skill but only in that he maintains his standards of good and evil as two solid entities and doesn't let them melt into each other until they become a jelly, as is done today.

*Hillyer*: He takes sides for the good, doesn't he? And he knows the distinction.

*Bryson*: He takes sides for the good, and yet his extraordinary dramatic skill is shown. In the Count, and in Guido, he has this capacity to show not only the evil in a man, but also some of the reasons for pity. Guido's life had been one long disappointment. He came from a high-placed family that had come on evil days. The background includes that horrible creature that's described as his mother; his family is a horrible family; he lives in a mouldy old castle; he thinks, by sitting at the gates of cardinals for a few years in Rome and taking minor orders, he can get a fortune. He never gets it. He reaches a kind of compromise: "Well, I can't be a great man; I'll go back to my old castle; I'll get me a pretty little wife; I will accept the second best thing. I can't be a great man, I'll be a happy one." And he isn't a happy one.

*Peterson*: I don't think he wanted to be a happy one. He simply wanted to secure that property and see that his family line went on, the way those families did and perhaps still would do if they had the same social setup. I don't think he was looking for happiness, Mr. Bryson. I think you are leaning over backwards to be tender with a person who really was weasel-souled and shabby through and through.

*Bryson*: I'm trying to be understanding, as I think Browning asked us to be. I think the defense of Guido is far more convincing than either of you seem to think it.

*Hillyer*: May I add to the damnation, however? I don't think there was ever a meaner trick played than Guido's sending to Caponsacchi notes which purported to come from Pompilia. Of course, Pompilia couldn't even read and write, so it would have been impossible. But Caponsacchi got these love letters from Pompilia, which she hadn't sent at all. Luckily, he was shrewd enough to know it.

*Bryson*: Of course he was mean! He was mean, he was sordid, and he ends in a paroxysm of insanity and violence. I'm not saying the man was a nice person. He was a horrible person. But he was also a person who suffered, and I think Browning makes you feel that.

*Peterson*: Oh yes, in the last passage that Guido is allowed—when the two churchmen come to his cell and he realizes that the Pope has ordered his execution—he turns completely paranoid and re-interprets his whole life in terms of persecution from the outside and the failure which was none of his doing; it was just fearful ill-luck and the cruelty of his pale, unresponsive bride. He does a terrific re-interpretation, almost to the point of insanity. And then, craven, complete coward that he was, at the very end, when they open the cell door and he realizes they're coming for him, he turns and says, "Pompilia!" calling on that poor little bride whom he's killed, "will you let them murder me?" That's a terrific line.

*Hillyer*: That is wonderful drama.

*Bryson*: Well, I'm not one to defend murderers, Miss Peterson, and I think the strongest point in this poem, as you say, is the clear sense of good and evil that Browning maintains, in spite of the intricacies of the psychology of these people. But I think he wants you

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to see that this man was a man who had suffered a great deal. Now, that doesn't make him a good man. It doesn't excuse any of his crimes, his meannesses, his deceit, nor his final violence. But he isn't, as Mr. Hillyer said he thought of him at first, incarnate evil, any more than Pompilia is incarnate good. Pompilia is a sweet child who lets herself be shoved around by her parents.

*Hillyer*: Shouldn't we add that Browning's treatment of all these characters is completely objective? When I say that I find Guido evil, it isn't because Browning said so. He gives you the material with great objectivity. That's why it's very dramatic.

*Peterson*: It applies in a curious way to today, a time of murder if ever there was one. Organized murder, murder for passion, murder for politics, murder for greed takes place all the time. But in this big city of New York, such enormous storms of feeling are not evoked by a murder. It goes by, as any little rainstorm or sleet storm goes by. Whereas, in Rome of those days, they really were on a moral plane; they were excited one way or the other. It was a terrific thing. It was a challenge to their wits to decide.

*Bryson*: I'm wondering, Miss Peterson, if Browning doesn't exaggerate the absorption that Rome had in this problem.

*Peterson*: Perhaps. It may be part of Browning's great humanitarianism in the nineteenth century which made him feel that this must have been a terrific cause and case.

*Bryson*: We've said nothing at all about this name—*The Ring and the Book*. The "book" is obvious. He found this book in the old book store.

*Hillyer*: The "ring," I feel, is more or less dragged in. He speaks of it as a symbol. I suppose it's a symbol of the intricate story—Renaissance passions and background and of life itself—a symbol of the way the pattern of a ring gradually comes out after all the carving and the eating away by acids. But don't you think it's a bit dragged in?

*Bryson*: I think it's dragged in, but it's an opportunity to get his wife into this.

*Peterson*: I supposed it referred to the alloy that is mixed with the gold. The alloy is his imagination. He's rationalizing his own freedom to reinterpret the story and blow into it all that he could possibly see in it—much of which probably wasn't in that dried up little old yellow book which consisted merely in the fact.

*Bryson*: Yes, but the "ring" is a symbol of his wife's love for Italy and Italy's love for his wife; and it gives him a chance to write that lyric in the beginning, which is one of the most famous things in the poem. But what's the final result of this? Do you understand human nature better?

*Hillyer*: Oh, decidedly!

*Bryson*: I'm not sure you do, you know. I think you're more involved in it, and you're more passionately concerned to understand it. But *do* you understand it?

*Hillyer*: Because you've become more flexible, you understand it. Every time one becomes more flexible and decides this person is not incarnate evil or incarnate good, then one takes a step forward.

*Peterson*: Well, after you are forced to look at the same list of facts from six or seven different points of view, inevitably it stretches your concept of human nature to realize that there can be so many points of view about one solid fact. That in itself is an enlargement. Then there's enormous beauty throughout the poem. The dramatic monologue has never, perhaps, been so perfectly carried out as by Browning in this case.

*Bryson*: A great many people have said that you can't write a long poem and make it beautiful at every point. I don't know whether that's true or not. One critic says that's because we aren't great enough poets. In any case, what Browning does here is to mix these difficult, obscure passages with flashing, flaming bits of pure lyricism. On top of it all, of course, there is this almost more than human wisdom of the Pope that gives the whole thing its wise perspective.

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# GEORGE MEREDITH

## *Diana of the Crossways*

CARLOS BAKER

JAN STRUTHER

LYMAN BRYSON

*Bryson:* In a sense this is one of the most surprising of the books on grandfather's bookshelf. I've come to think that this particular grandfather was a very unusual person, because *Diana of the Crossways*, although it was popular for a Meredith book, was by no means a popular book. It's a difficult book even if it's a great one.

*Baker:* It's difficult, I think, in the sense that Browning's *The Ring and the Book* was difficult. For one thing, both books have a common origin in truth. You might say, for example, that when Browning found the old yellow book, on which he based the story of *The Ring and the Book*, he was preceding Meredith—except that Meredith based his story on old, yellow journalism. Well, it was not so old either, because it relates to the story of Caroline Norton, the granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who was haled into the English law courts on several occasions by an incompatible husband.

*Bryson:* She was a lady who, in those mid-Victorian days, did not behave quite the way a lady was expected to behave.

*Struther:* Mrs. Norton, or Diana?

*Bryson:* Both, Mrs. Struther. But let's stick to the fictional lady.

*Struther:* The fictional lady? Well, I'm practically speechless. I'm sure I'll recover from it soon. I remember that last time we talked about books it was *Pride and Prejudice*, and I took a dim view of *Pride and Prejudice*. I didn't care for it.

*Bryson:* You weren't very kind to Jane Austen.

*Struther:* This time I'm way on the other side of idolatry about Meredith—about Diana the book, and Diana the woman.

*Bryson:* Do you think it's a good book?

*Struther:* I think it's one of the six best novels. Don't ask me to name the other five.

*Baker:* Oh, I think that's quite in order! This story, if you can call it a story, relates to a wild Irish girl who impulsively marries a wrong man.



*Bryson*: For protection!

*Baker*: Yes. She marries this man Warwick partly, I think, because he lives in the house where she was raised. Also, he is perhaps intended, in some part, to take the place of her father. But they live a life of quiet desperation; and, in the course of that, she is accused by her husband of an affair with the elderly Lord Danisborough. After she has been freed in the law courts of that accusation, and after Danisborough has died, she begins a friendship with his nephew, Percy Dacier. Well, he has something to be said for him.

*Bryson*: We used to take him as a figure of the great English statesman, and they're generally horrid in their youth—with all due respect to English statesmen. They have to ripen before they're tolerable.

*Baker*: In any case, Diana bankrupts herself and gets in the way of her own writing. She's a novelist, too. She's one of those women. She is a sort of a salon-keeper, you might say, for the Honorable Percy Dacier. That costs a lot of money, and she has to keep up a front, so, in the end, she betrays a political secret for money. She sells a cabinet secret that Dacier has told her about to the *London Times*, and that inevitably turns Dacier away from her. In the end, there is Redworth, the faithful servitor and guide and friend who comes in and marries her.

*Struther*: The reason she was so much in debt, always in the red, and always broke, was that Dacier wanted her to give dinner parties for him so that he could get on in the world. She spent a great deal of money doing that; and he was an absolute heel to turn on her—although she shouldn't have sold the secret.

*Bryson*: She shouldn't have sold the secret. It was unworthy of her. Much as we love her—and I love her quite as much as you do, Miss Struther.

*Baker*: And Meredith loved her, too!

*Bryson*: Oh, Meredith adored her! And for good reason. It's one of the few cases in which you see why a man, who wrote a book about a woman, loved the woman. You really can love Diana.

*Struther*: Yes!

*Bryson*: I have just one objection to the way you tell the story, Mr. Baker, which you did brilliantly. It sounds as if Redworth got something that wasn't worth having. As a matter of fact—although this book has the worst chapter in English literature, the first chapter is simply terrible—I don't see how any man . . . his publisher should have thrown that chapter out without even considering it. But the novel has the most convincing last part that anybody could want. Meredith had a terrific problem. Here: on the one hand, this brilliant woman who had had so much trouble; on the other, poor Redworth, the engineer, the businessman, the nice bourgeois, who waits in the wings until she gets through her adventures. Then he gets her—and at this point he might well feel he had reason for wondering: was she worth having? The scene in which he offers himself is one of the most terrifically convincing love scenes in any book in English literature.

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*Struther*: Yes!

*Bryson*: But she finally realized she loved him all the time.

*Struther*: She not only loves him, but Redworth's own thoughts about love, when he really allows himself to confess that he is madly in love with her, make the most wonderful description of love. Remember, when he says the difference between appetite and love is shown when a man, after years of service, can see and hear and admit the possible, and still desire and worship. I think that's superb.

*Baker*: I agree that Redworth is a very admirable character, and I certainly didn't mean to suggest that, in getting Diana in the end, he got what he didn't deserve, or that she didn't deserve him. It seems to me that, from the time of the Irish Ball, which takes place in Chapter Two, Redworth and Diana were fated to come together; but Diana's character is one of the things that keeps them apart.

*Bryson*: One of her characters!

*Struther*: Yes! Yes! She has two!

*Baker*: Perhaps we ought to point out that there's the Diana Warwick, the lady; and then there's Tony Merion. Her middle name is Antonia, and her nickname is Tony, and her maiden name is Merion. Tony Merion is the innocent, rather guileless girl, who is, at the same time, a good deal of a social rebel. She says at one point in the book: "I am at war with myself. I am a married rebel and therefore a social rebel." The whole action of the book stems from her social rebellion against the things that Victorian England forced upon women.

*Struther*: Yes!

*Baker*: This is a book about the freedom of women, isn't it?

*Struther*: I think it is. Diana said, remember, that she'd been deformed by marriage, an unhappy marriage.

*Baker*: That's a nice phrase.

*Struther*: Isn't it wonderful!

*Bryson*: I think it's important, Miss Struther, to bring in the fact that the name, *Diana of the Crossways*, has a double meaning. "Crossways" is the name of her old ancestral home, to which she wants to return.

*Baker*: It was the name of a farm in Surrey, too.

*Bryson*: And "Crossways" is also a metaphorical reference to the double life she led, because she had a double nature.

*Baker*: Also, I think there may be some echo here of Shakespeare's "star-crossed lovers" in *Romeo and Juliet*. Crossways, star-crossed. She's society-crossed. In fact, society is the real villain.

*Bryson*: And how Meredith hates it!

*Struther*: Particularly what he calls the upper middle-classes as opposed to the upper-classes. Not out of snobbism—but because he thinks that the upper-classes are carefree, and assured enough of their position to go in for being honest and intelligent, whereas the upper middle-classes are uncertain and fearful of making social blunders. He despises them.

*Baker*: All the scandal-mongering journals—he talks about what he calls the "old dog world"—were preparing to yelp on the scent.

The "old dog world" is precisely this world that Miss Struther was speaking of. When she has a friendship with a much older man, Lord Danisborough, who originally was Lord Melbourne in the original story.

*Bryson*: It was a completely innocent friendship.

*Baker*: A completely innocent one. He adored her, as he had every right to do, and perhaps wrote her some letters that he shouldn't have written. But Meredith says that no great scandal had occurred for several months, and that the world was in want of one, so one immediately broke. Society is really the villain here, along with scandal-mongering journals.

*Struther*: They didn't have columnists in those days.

*Bryson*: They didn't really need them. They had the people who did the same dirt without much difficulty.

*Baker*: Lady Wathin is one of those people that we have to watch in Meredith. He mixes up his goods and evils in Diana or in Lady Wathin. She's really a good woman. She's well-intentioned, but what she actually does is to ruin some phases of Diana's life.

*Bryson*: At least temporarily! Diana comes out triumphantly, because she comes out on her own, so to speak. She doesn't care about society at the end. That is her real triumph, isn't it?

*Struther*: I think the best short description of Diana in the book is where Meredith compares her with this awful female drip, Constance Asper, this spotless debutante, whom Dacier eventually marries. He says that Constance Asper was the "right worshipful heroine of romance," whereas poor Diana was the "flecked heroine" of reality, not always the same, not impeccable, not an ignorant innocent, nor guileless, good under good leading, devoted to the death in a grave crisis, often wrestling with her terrestrial nature nobly, and a growing soul. That's the point.

*Baker*: That "growing soul" is very important, I think. Diana grows throughout the book and, if it is one of the tests of a good novel that the main character should grow, I would say that Diana definitely survives that test; and *Diana of the Crossways* then becomes an estimable novel, a kind of a "Portrait of a Lady." Meredith might have borrowed that title from James, if James had already projected it. This is a portrait of a lady who has real brains and real blood. In fact, Meredith was so much steamed up about his heroine that he found that she began to lead him rather than he lead her. He said she had no puppet pliancy. He had a very feeble hold on her, he said, and it was she who led him along, I suppose by the nose—or perhaps by the heart would be a better way of expressing it.

*Struther*: By the brain and the heart! Because he made Sullivan Smith, the Irishman, say she had the brain of Socrates or better, say, Minerva, on the shoulders of Venus!

*Baker*: That's very good characterization. "She is the woman of brains and passion," is another characterizing phrase of Meredith.

*Bryson*: Isn't his chief indictment of the bourgeois side of the Victorian world, that he hated so much, that it didn't allow women to have brains?

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*Struther*: It didn't allow them to have brains and beauty. They could be a hideous bluestocking.

*Bryson*: Then they were treated with condescension. But if they were beautiful and had brains—

*Struther*: Then they were sunk! Diana herself said: "Men have got past Seraglio Point, but they have not yet rounded Cape Turk!"

*Bryson*: And yet, it is her relations with men that we discover the facets of Diana's character? She was a waif, she was an orphan. She turns to Warwick, a suspicious, inflexible, middle-aged man, and she marries him because he is a refuge. Then, after she is frightened by things that have happened to her, an unprotected person, Dacier appeals to her sense of brilliance. She's going to get ahead in the world.

*Struther*: Yes!

*Bryson*: She almost runs away with him. It is only the illness of Emma, whom we haven't mentioned yet. She is Diana's dearest woman friend, and her illness pulls Diana back. Then there is Redworth.

*Struther*: And nine others! At least ten of them proposed to her. I counted. I kept a little list.

*Bryson*: Well, everybody either proposed to her or wanted to, and you understand why.

*Struther*: I think the friendship between Diana and Emma Dunstane, who was her very great friend and a few years older than she, and married, is unique in literature. I've never read any other book which has really described a deep friendship between two women without making it sound silly.

*Baker*: If you'll excuse me, Miss Struther, I think it sounds a little silly sometimes when they call each other "My dearest dear," and other Victorian prettinesses.

*Struther*: Have you ever heard two women talking to each other?

*Baker*: Sometimes—with a shudder! Some of it is a little hard to take. In fact, that wonderful scene after the death of Diana's husband—

*Struther*: Surely a good thing!

*Baker*: And after Dacier's discovery that she has divulged the secret, she apparently has some kind of brainstorm and goes to bed in a dark cold room in the middle of the winter, won't eat, and is simply lying there and trying to die by holding her breath—at that time in comes the ministering angel, her good friend, Emma, to whom she had ministered years before. I find all this a little bit sentimental. But Meredith was so anxious to avoid sentimentality that he leaned over backwards to throw in satirical gibes whenever he could. I'm not entirely convinced by this scene.

*Struther*: I'm convinced merely because I have known that actual scene to happen in real life.

*Bryson*: That doesn't really prove it! Do you think it's typical? Anything can happen in real life. But, in a good novel, Miss Struther, only things that are convincing should happen.

*Struther*: He convinces me!

*Bryson*: He does? Well, he does me, too. I'm on your side. I was never present when two ladies were talking alone.

*Baker*: That would be impossible!

*Bryson*: Well, I've never eavesdropped on two ladies in their deepest friendship, but I am convinced. In fact, I'm moved by it, Mr. Baker.

*Baker*: I must say that I am, too—with certain reservations. I find myself making reservations all the way along, whenever this friendship between the two ladies is projected. It's a little bit too much of a muchness—if I can throw in that old phrase.

*Bryson*: Well, perhaps Diana is entitled to her silly side. I don't mean the friendship, which is profound and true, but her way of expressing it. She's got a right to be silly. It's plausible in her day.

*Struther*: Remember, this book is supposed to have taken place about 1845, and they did talk a bit silly in those days, didn't they? I mean, you can see that from old diaries and letters.

*Baker*: Well, I withdraw my complaint, because both women had one of the qualities that Meredith admired very much—a discerning sense of spiritual values. This very loyalty that they had all their lives long—springing to each other's aid in crucial moments and always offering haven to each other when they were in difficulties—that kind of a thing is admirable, and it's admirably projected.

*Struther*: The friendship between women is one of the things I like best about this book, and there are two or three others. It's one of the few books I've ever read which can describe a witty woman—or man for that matter—and really make her witty. It's one of the few books that can describe somebody in a mood of joy and really make the reader feel joy coursing right through their blood. And it's one of the few books that can talk about writing and writers and, at least to a writer, make it sound convincing.

*Baker*: This is valuable testimony, coming from a distinguished writer. I must say that whenever any writer writes about a writer writing it becomes incredible to me. I can't for a minute believe in these novels that Diana keeps writing. You don't know anything about their content. You don't know what pitch she follows in them. You know very little about them at all. You have no sense of the brain-sweat that goes into writing.

*Bryson*: And yet, Mr. Baker, you admit that you do have the feeling that Diana has brains.

*Baker*: Oh, yes!

*Struther*: And besides, it doesn't matter what she wrote, or what you wrote, or what I wrote, or what Meredith wrote. The point is that he gets across the feeling of what a writer goes through when he, or she, is writing.

*Baker*: That is true. One of the reasons that Diana runs into difficulties is that she's so busy being a salon-keeper that she hasn't time for her writing—and time is what you need most of all.

*Bryson*: There's one thing about this book that we haven't indicated yet, although there's a hint of it in your saying that Meredith makes these qualities in Diana so real, and that is—I think you said

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this before, Mr. Baker—that Meredith is a poet and that his being a poet gets in the way of his being a novelist. His style is so weighted, so metaphorical.

*Baker:* That's very true. The metaphorical habit, this wasteful fusillade of images that turn and twist before your eyes and become other images, is very difficult to carry along. He has the urge to write epigrams—I've got to get this in before Miss Struther beats on the table—but, at that same time, he has an immense dexterity in the manipulation of his images.

*Struther:* I gather you don't care for metaphors?

*Baker:* I know the quotation you're going to throw at us!

*Struther:* I hate to be nasty, but Meredith does say that: "Metaphors were her refuge. The sluggish in intellect detest them."

*Baker:* That's very nice, but I'd like to quote back at you Dr. Johnson's remark on the novels of Samuel Richardson. He said to Boswell, you remember, "Why, sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would go out and hang yourself."

*Bryson:* I think this is very important in regard to Meredith. So many people are put off by the brilliance, the scintillation of Meredith's style, and by his, perhaps excessive, intellectuality, that they do not dare to approach him. This very book, which is not too much marked by his mannerisms, is a metaphor itself, perhaps also a metaphor of what is wrong with Meredith. That terrible first chapter, in which there's nothing but abstractions and fireworks puts you off from realizing that, as you go through the book, you will dig deeper and deeper into the passions of very, very real people. The emotional side of the book is buried until you dig down to it.

*Struther:* That's perfectly true, and what it all works up to is one sentence, close to the end, where Diana says, "The debts we owe ourselves are the hardest to pay." That's modern psychiatry in a nutshell, isn't it?

*Baker:* Yes, and that's the payment towards which she has been moving throughout the book—that and Redworth. The decision to accept Redworth as a husband is what she's been moving towards all along. As our old friend Polonius said: "This above all, to thine own self be true." While she was with Dacier, and certainly while she was with Warwick, she was not being true to her true capabilities. In a sense, she was only true to herself when she ran away to Italy. You remember that wonderful scene at Lake Lugano, with its refrain: "restored to powers of nature."

*Struther:* That's joy. That's the paragraph about joy. It's on a right-hand page in my book. It's a whole paragraph which describes joy in the early morning, as she is walking up the mountain. Every sentence just makes you fill with joy.

*Baker:* Meredith is a fresh air fiend, and this is simply a translation of his own delight in the Surrey country, which I'm sure you know very well. He projects that again and again at crucial moments. Nature seems to come in, in an almost Wordsworthian way,

to restore the characters. This seems particularly true of Diana, because you don't get nature much in connection with the others.

*Bryson*: I'm not sure there isn't even a deeper irony here that Meredith buried very deep. After having defended a woman of brains and beauty against the stupidities of the Victorian bourgeoisie, he indicates that this woman herself might have done much better to trust her heart than her brains.

*Struther*: Well, she had to drop both.

*Bryson*: But it was her brains that led her away from her true husband in the beginning. It was the sense of being a great success with her mind and her wit.

*Struther*: Yes, that is so; but she does grow. As you say, she grows throughout the book. That is the wonderful thing about this. All the characters grow. Even Redworth grows.

*Bryson*: That's true, but I do think that Meredith is saying, fundamentally, "Yes, my dear, you have beauty and you have brains; but you might better have trusted your passionate heart in the beginning."

*Baker*: Still, Meredith is a great proponent of the idea of philosophy in fiction, and he says, "We live in what we have done, in the idea." For him the parent fountain of life is the idea, as opposed to the perishable blood, and he wants to image life and to accept whatever is there, if he can.

*Struther*: All I can say is that I would sooner have written that book than any other novel, and I would sooner meet Meredith than any other author, and I'd sooner be a tiny bit like Diana than any other woman I can think of.

*Bryson*: I can't imagine paying Diana any better compliment, Miss Struther.





# Footnotes

ALTHOUGH FEW ECONOMISTS TODAY SHARE HIS THEORIES, HENRY GEORGE (1839-97) is credited with creating the most widely-read economic treatise ever written by an American. It was the devastating panic of 1873 that set George in search for the answer to the bewildering puzzle that saw poverty abound with every step of progress. While many others attempted similar answers, it was George's work, *Progress and Poverty*, that caught the public's attention. His views have been commemorated in part in local legislation in various quarters of the world, and his name and opinions are still kept alive through the work of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, and the Henry George School of Social Science, in New York City.

NOTWITHSTANDING HIS EARLY POVERTY, THE BOOKS HE READ DURING HIS FORMATIVE years, his love of the theatre, or his unhappy love affair at eighteen, it was the character of the age in which Charles Dickens (1812-1870) lived that played the most dominant factor in molding his life and work. It was the era of industrial growth, and the rise of the middle class of which he identified himself. His scene was London; his works reflected the toll that this sprawling, heaving, burgeoning city exacted from the souls of its people. He loved it as he despised it. Away from it, his writing was labored, except for an *Old Curiosity Shop*. After completing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1865, Dickens made extensive reading tours in England and in America. He was stricken with apoplexy in 1870, half-way through *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

DR. SAMUEL C. CHEW POINTS OUT IN A LITERARY HISTORY OF ENGLAND (Appleton-Century-Crofts) that "Wilde struck in various directions, but not at random, against contemporary standards of taste and morality, and more fundamentally at contemporary society. In his social criticism he was probably as sincere as it was in his nature to be; but one feels that he desired a free society rather for the sake of the freedom it would give him than for the general good . . . the real Wilde is to be found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* . . . and in so far as the novel is an apologue of divided personality it is prophetic of the ruin into which the author was soon to fall." *The Importance of Being Earnest* was written five years before Oscar Wilde's death (1856-1900).

AT TEN, JOHN STUART MILL (1806-1873), THE ELDEST SON OF JAMES MILL, THE Scottish philosopher, historian and economist, read Plato and Demosthenes with ease, and before the age of twenty he was a champion of the utilitarian school of thought. He applied economic doctrines to social conditions, and among his best known works are: *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, *Utilitarianism* and *Representative Government*; Mill voted with the advanced Radical Party and was a staunch advocate of women's suffrage.

HENRY JAMES (1843-1916) WAS THE BROTHER OF PHILOSOPHER WILLIAM JAMES, and the son of Swedenborg thinker Henry James, Sr. Educated both in England and in America, James is considered one of the greatest figures in the history of the novel form. He is best known for his realistic psychological

penetration and analysis; in this respect he is ranked with Hawthorne. However, unlike Hawthorne, James' eminence is still questioned, and his works have not been widely read. In 1915, James became a naturalized British citizen, preferring to live abroad, finding the brash, materialistic spirit of the United States of his time not conducive to his best work. Important influences on James were Eliot, Hawthorne, Flaubert, and Turgenev.

EDWARD FITZGERALD (1809-1881) WHO LIVED A HARMLESSLY SELFISH, HEDONISTIC life found in the quatrains of Omar Khayyam, the twelfth-century poet, the revelation of a like spirit. Although Fitzgerald was a man of letters, all of his other works have been eclipsed by his translation of the *Rubaiyat*. Persian scholars who have compared his version with the original, point out that much has been omitted and little added; however, what was loose and lax was tightened, and what was coarse was refined away. The *Rubaiyat* is said to have aided in shaping the melancholy hedonism of late nineteenth-century England.

ALTHOUGH AUGUST STRINDBERG (1849-1912) CANNOT BE CLASSIFIED IN ANY ONE school—he was in turn a naturalist, a mystic and an iconoclast—his influence continues to be a force, particularly in the theatre. He was married and divorced three times, and the tortured misery of these episodes, reflecting his own highly-charged temperament which often bordered on madness, was the subject of many of his plays and novels. His chief autobiographical fiction includes the short stories in *Married*, *The Son of a Servant*, and *The Inferno*.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES' (1809-94) FIRST IMPORTANT POEM, OLD IRONSIDES, was published while he was studying law at Harvard. The famous series of his "breakfast sketches" made their first appearance in *Atlantic Monthly* (which he named) in 1857. These writings were collected and published as *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* in 1858. His wit and gift for rhyming made him a stimulating and popular lyceum speaker, as well as a master of occasional verse. He is the father of the eminent Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

ISRAEL ZANGWILL'S (1864-1926) NOVELS ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY JEWISH LIFE IN reality. Born in London, Zangwill founded the humorous paper *Ariel*, and started his literary career as a journalist. Many of his works were later dramatized; he was prominent in the Zionist movement, and he furthered the cause with two volumes, *Principle of Nationalities* and *Chosen Peoples*. He is best known for his biographical studies, *Dreamers of the Ghetto*, and *Children of the Ghetto*.

HERBERT SPENCER'S (1820-1903) KEEN INTEREST IN SOCIAL PROBLEMS LED HIM to reject an engineering career, to become a writer. Unlike the academic training he received in the physical sciences, he was self-educated in his new interest, studying widely the natural sciences, and psychology. In 1853, he became subeditor of the *Economist* and met with such intellectual leaders as John Stuart Mill and George Eliot. Spencer applied his evolutionary principle to all phases of life, rather than limiting it to the investigation of phenomena and its relationships. His *Principles of Biology* carries this theme, and explains how life has progressed through a continuous adaptation of inner and outer relationships.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT (1850-1893) HELD MANY OFFICIAL POSITIONS IN THE French government during much of his life. He is best known for his numerous short stories, dealing chiefly with Norman peasant life, the Franco-Prussian War, the petit-bourgeoisie, and the morbid psychological obsessions of

his own later life. Although many stories are episodes from his own life, they are distinguished by his own objectivity. A prolific author, he became insane near the end of his life, as a result of overwork.

THE RING AND THE BOOK IS ROBERT BROWNING'S (1812-1889) MOST FAMOUS and ambitious work. His poetry is distinguished by its learning, its psychological analyses of character, and its use of the dramatic monologue. Much of his work, when first published, was considered "obscure" and difficult. Born of artistic and scholarly parents, Browning is said to have turned to writing as a career, after reading Shelley. He married the poet Elizabeth Barrett, and took her to Italy for fifteen happy years until her death. Browning died in Venice and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

BECAUSE HE DIDN'T LOVE THE OBSCURE, BUT HATED THE APPARENT, GEORGE Meredith (1828-1909) has never reached more than a fraction of his potential audience. This brilliant unconventionality made his writing difficult for the average reader, and he did not receive wide recognition as a novelist until the publication of *Diana of the Crossways*. He was born in Portsmouth, England and was educated at a Moravian School on the Rhine. He supported himself in his early years by contributing to magazines and newspapers, and was later a reader for the publishing house of Chapman and Hall.



## Booknotes

IN HIS POSTSCRIPT TO YESTERDAY, LLOYD MORRIS SHOWED AMERICA ITS LAST fifty years. It was a cavalcade that recreated a most dynamic era of our history, interpreting with deep nostalgia and ironic wit the broader changes of social and economic life in the country since 1896. In his *Not So Long Ago*, Morris narrowed his examination to the three specific inventions most responsible for these changes—the motion picture, the automobile and the radio. This penetrating study brought into sharp focus the men and women most responsible in developing them. His story was social history at its best. Now, once more, in his recent *Incredible New York*, Mr. Morris transmutes the dull clay of painstaking research into a lasting work of art. Crackling with excitement, you'll witness the colorful review out of which New York emerged to greatness. Complementing the superb text are nearly a hundred carefully chosen drawings, paintings and lithographs. All three volumes were published by Random House, are still in print and sell for \$5.00 each.

OSCAR WILDE'S *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST* IS ONE OF THE NINE PLAYS included in Eric Bentley's new collection, *The Play: A Critical Anthology* (Prentice-Hall, \$3.95). In this new and highly readable anthology, you are invited to a greater understanding and critical enjoyment of drama. After your reading of the plays, which include Arthur Miller's popular contemporary play *Death of a Salesman*, Rostand's *Cyrano De Bergerac*, and plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, Shakespeare, Moliere, and Jean Cocteau's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, you are challenged to exercise your critical perception of Miller's play in light of the dramatic masterpieces previously read in the book. Included in the volume are critical reviews of the play by Brooks Atkinson, John Mason Brown, and others, as well as Arthur Miller's own notes on the nature of the tragedy in his play. This volume is a companion piece to the previously published *The Story: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Mark Schorer. Containing stories by such masters of the art as Thomas Mann, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, *The Story* is designed to aid the reader in an appreciation and critical evaluation of the short story as a literary form. The editor's critical comments discuss the components of fiction from the simplest anecdotal forms through to the long story which approaches the novel. In this connection he includes Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, together with contrasting critical interpretations by Edmund Wilson and Robert Heilman, as a problem for critical consideration.

# Selected Bibliography

The selections made in this bibliography cover the books to be discussed on *Invitation to Learning*, Jan.-March, 1952, and the discussions contained in this issue of the *Quarterly*; the editions were selected on the basis of quality of text and translations as well as economy of price. These editions are available in many cases in your local bookshop or library. Those having difficulty in obtaining them, may order from our Readers Service Bureau. Simply send your order, plus remittance to:

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Readers Service Bureau  
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*Progress and Poverty*, Henry George; An inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increases of want with increase of wealth; The remedy. Modern Library, \$1.25.

*Our Mutual Friend*, Charles Dickens; New Century Library, \$3.00.

*Plays of Oscar Wilde*; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*On Liberty, Utilitarianism, & On Representative Government*, John Stuart Mill; Everyman's Library, \$1.45.

*The Ambassadors*, Henry James; One of James' most famous novels dealing with the mission of two ambassadors, a man and a woman, sent abroad one after the other by a wealthy American woman to find out what holds her son in Paris. Harpers, \$3.00.

*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald; The Living Library Edition of the Persian-English classic poem printed in two colors and illustrated by Joseph Low. World Publishing, \$1.25.

*Eight Famous Plays*, August Strindberg; Scribners, \$4.50.

*Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, Oliver Wendell Holmes; Houghton Mifflin, \$2.50 (available July 1952).

*Dreamers of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill; Tudor, \$2.50.

*First Principles*, Herbert Spencer; Appleton (out of print).

*Best Short Stories*, Guy deMaupassant; selected and with an introduction by Saxe Commins, Modern Library, \$1.25.

*Poems and Plays*, Robert Browning; Modern Library Giant, \$2.45.

*Diana of the Crossways*, George Meredith; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*The Way of All Flesh*, Samuel Butler; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*The Divine Comedy*, Dante; Modern Library, \$1.25, Introduction by Charles H. Grandgent.

*Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsky; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*The Forsyte Saga*, John Galsworthy; Scribners, \$2.98. Motion picture edition.

*Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega y Gasset; Norton, \$3.00, also New American Library, \$35.

*Moby Dick*, Herman Melville; Modern Library, \$1.25.

*The Trial*, Franz Kafka; Knopf, \$3.00.

*Faust*, Goethe; Modern Library, \$1.25. Translated by Bayard Taylor.

*Ulysses*, James Joyce; Modern Library Giant, \$2.45. Includes foreword by Morris L. Ernst and the decision of the U. S. District Court rendered by John M. Woolsey.

*Jean Christophe*, Romain Rolland; Modern Library Giant, \$2.45. Trans. by Gilbert Cannan.

*Human Destiny*, Lecomte Du Noüy; Longmans, \$3.50, also New American Library, \$.25.

*Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann; Knopf, \$5.00. A vast intellectual drama of the forces which play on modern man—an acknowledged masterpiece.

*Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust; Random House, \$12.50, 2 vols. boxed; also (Modern Library, 7 vols.), \$1.25 each.



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